1 Key Points

This page is only a summary and must be read in the context of this entire document

**Aim:** The aim of the project is to provide you experience in the practicalities of conducting research and communicating its results in written form in an applied area relevant to your specialisation (i.e., Organisational). Beyond the specific content of the project, it is aimed at improving your formal writing skills and your ability to critically understand research literature you may use in your professional career. Research in organisational settings is encouraged, but laboratory studies using volunteers from the general public and Psychology I students can be justified, e.g., evaluation of a general training method.

**Supervision:** Each project has a primary supervisor and a co-supervisor, who liaise with the Program Director. The co-supervisor may be another member of the School, an academic elsewhere in UNSW (e.g., School of Management). The primary supervisor, however, is entirely responsible for supervision at the stage of analysis of results and writing of the thesis.

**Ethics:** You must have written ethical clearance for your project before you start data collection. For the application form and instructions, go to: [http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/research](http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/research) and scroll down.

**Thesis Due Date:** 4pm Friday, Week 12; extensions are rarely granted and are at the discretion of the Program Director. See [Part 3 Detailed Timetable](#) for further milestones in producing the thesis.

**Thesis Length:** You should aim for your thesis (including abstract, methods, results, discussions; excluding references and appendices) to between 7000 and 8000 words. The aim of this restriction is to refine your thinking about professional communication away from the premium placed on thoroughness and complexity at the Honours level, toward the succinct presentation and sharp focus required in most report writing and other professional writing in professional settings.

**Thesis Format:** For detail on this topic, please see section [3.3 Preparing Your Thesis](#) towards the end of this document. The thesis should be prepared as “an article suitable for submission to a peer-reviewed, international scientific journal.” As a rule, the format of the thesis should conform tightly to the standards of the American Psychological Association for submission of a manuscript, which is effectively the world-wide standard for psychological publications. See in particular Chapter 2 of the APA Publication Manual, 6th Edition (2009) regarding manuscript preparation.

**Feedback on drafts:** The supervisor is permitted to read the introduction, methods and results section twice before submission. The supervisor (and co-supervisor) are not permitted to provide feedback on the discussion section of the thesis.

**Marking:** The thesis is marked by two members of the academic staff of the School. The supervisor and co-supervisor are not involved in marking the thesis.
2 Nature of Research

Area
The project may be carried out in any area relevant to your specialisation. Research into basic psychological processes (e.g., conceptual development, attitude change, social decision-making) is appropriate, provided the significance of the findings, in the context of your specialisation, is clearly indicated. Theoretical or literature reviews are generally not appropriate since the intention of the project is to provide experience in the practicalities of carrying out a research or evaluation project in an applied area. In every case, the topic and approach should be developed under the guidance of your thesis supervisor.

Examples of past projects include: Design and evaluation of training and facilitation methods; meta-analyses of performance data; development and validation of new measures; interrogation of secondary data bases to solve organisational problems; and studies exploring the role of emotions, values and personality on organisational outcomes.

Design
A wide variety of research strategies may be employed to meet the specific scientific aims of the project. Common strategies include experimental, quasi-experimental and correlational designs. The research may be theory-driven or exploratory, but in the latter case it is still necessary to spell out the theoretical context and indicate the significance of various potential outcomes. Qualitative data may be generated in some projects, requiring specific strategies (e.g., content analysis) to condense and organise the results and to allow conclusions to be drawn. Often quantitative measures may be extracted from qualitative data (e.g., ratings by judges, counts of word usage), which facilitate analysis. We require that the primary analyses be quantitative rather than qualitative.

Single case designs and case series would normally be presented as part of a larger study in order to illustrate a particular issue. Research based on existing data sets may be permitted where a case can be made that 1) the question of interest is best addressed by existing data, and 2) other aspects of the research process (e.g., theoretical analysis, data analysis) can be expanded to compensate for the absence of any contribution to the procedure and data collection. In all cases, care should be taken to ensure that there is sufficient scope in the project to satisfy thesis requirements. For example, norming of a psychological test would not be sufficient for a thesis.

Participants
Participants (aka “subjects”) may be drawn from a variety of Organisations, the general community, or from the Psychology 1 participant pool. For example, projects on attitudes often rely on volunteers from the general public, whilst training methods could be investigated with Psychology I students and evaluation of a training program might take place in an Organisation. Access to sufficient participants from the desired population within the time frame of the project is crucial to its viability.

Investigators
Often it is beneficial for a research project to be conducted in collaboration with other researchers. Firstly, it may be possible to work within an ongoing project, either within or outside of the School. While this arrangement may reduce the scope for determining the aims of the project, and to some extent the design and procedure employed, these costs may be offset by other benefits such as access to participants or payment of a salary. In most instances, it should be possible to play a role in determining some aspects of design and implementation, and a primary role in data analysis. Where aspects of the design have been constrained, it is important to spell these out in the thesis, provide a critical analysis of the design, and consider alternative approaches that might have been used.

A second example of collaborative research involves contracting to conduct a project commissioned or requested by some Organisation. The benefits of such an arrangement are similar to those
described above, but there is generally greater scope in determining the research strategy to meet the specified aims.

Finally, it may be advantageous in some projects for the research to be carried out by a small group (e.g., 2-3) of Masters Students. This arrangement is particularly useful where a great deal of data collection and analysis is involved. Design and implementation of the project is shared, but each student writes an independent thesis.

**Supervision**

Each project has a primary supervisor and a co-supervisor, who liaise with the Masters Committee. The supervisor and co-supervisor are normally members of the academic staff of the School. In many projects, particularly those conducted in Organisations external to the University, another person may have a major role in overseeing the design and conduct of the research. In such cases there should be close cooperation between the person concerned and the supervisor, however the academic supervisor is entirely responsible for supervision at the stage of analysis of results and writing of the thesis.

It is expected that you will comply with the supervision arrangements preferred by your supervisor. These may include weekly meetings, attendance at lab meetings, or other types of engagement. These arrangement can be negotiated between the supervisor and yourself, however ultimately your supervisor is best placed to determine what involvement is required in order to ensure appropriate progress and quality of the research project. If progress or contributions are not considered by your supervisor to be of suitable quality, your supervisor should advise the Program Director and your progress in the Research Thesis course may be reviewed.

The completed thesis is marked by two members of the academic staff of the School. The supervisor and co-supervisor are not involved in marking the thesis but does provide the program Director with an assessment of student contribution and competence throughout the project.

**Statistical consultation**

The supervisor has primary responsibility for advising on research design and data analysis. However, a supervisor who feels that additional advice is necessary can organise a meeting with an appropriate statistical consultant (e.g., Dr Kevin Bird). Both the supervisor and student should attend such a meeting.

**Resources**

*Computing:* The Masters computer lab is located in Mathews Room 1101. Additional computers and printing facilities are in Mathews Rooms 209, 209A, 422 as well as on Level 8. Students are given their own Psychology account and are assigned a print quota. Students have access 24 hours a day/7 days a week to these facilities.

In addition there are bookable labs (907, 927, 1002 and 1022) which are available to conduct research. Computer labs are booked through Camilla Leung (c.leung@unsw.edu.au).

*Equipment:* Students may use School equipment available for loan from the Technical Support Unit in Mathews Room 138 (e.g., tape recorders, slide projectors), tests available from the Test Library in Mathews Room 803, and equipment under the control of their supervisor.

*Consumables:* Normally, photocopying and other consumables are paid for by the student or by other parties involved in the project.

**Ethical Approval**

All research must comply with University ethical standards, regardless of the source of your participants. Ethics approval is required even if secondary data analysis is conducted. Read the
ethics application procedures and application forms found here: http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/research (you need to scroll down). Discuss the ethical issues that may arise in connection with your research with your supervisor. Complete the application form, have your supervisor check and sign the forms and deliver these to the office on Level 10, and advise staff that these are needed for review by the ethics committee.

You must have an approved and signed copy of the application form back from the Head of School and an email to you and your supervisor from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) stating approval and assigning the project a file number. (For projects approved through Psychology’s Human research Ethics Advisory Panel (HREAP), the file number will be a four digit number. In addition to School and University approval (via the DVC-R), you may need approval from other bodies. This will be so, for example, if your research is supported by ARC or NHMRC funds. Your supervisor can help you to identify the Committees relevant for your project.

If you are being supervised by a member of another school, typically UNSW School of Management you may apply for ethics approval through either the Psychology HREAP or the HREAP relevant to that school. Most students and their supervisors find it easier to apply through the Psychology HREAP.

In the case of collaborative research, it is important to clarify in advance the nature of the research relationship – for example, the issue of “ownership” of the project and of the data. In some cases it may be appropriate to spell out these issues in writing. In the case where supervision is being provided by external agencies, your academic supervisor can assist you to formalise an “ownership” agreement.

Publications
The thesis is to be presented as a journal article suitable for publication in a specific journal. The document itself is to be consistent with the publication recommendations and requirements except where they conflict with explicit requirements stated in this document. Students are encouraged to submit their research for publication in that journal and to present the research at relevant conferences. Order of authorship should be determined by the degree of contribution to the final product, including design, data collection, analysis and writing of the manuscript.

3 Detailed timetable

Students are required to enrol in PSYC7126 Research Thesis (Organisational) 1 in Semester 1, and PSYC7127 Research Thesis (Organisational) 2 in Semester 2, and submit the thesis by the end of Semester 2 of that year.

The timetable for research projects is outlined below. Applications for extensions will only be considered by the Masters Committee (the Program Director) when:

1. The application is in writing;
2. The delay is due to circumstances beyond your control (e.g., illness, equipment breakdown, constraints on collaborative research);
3. The circumstances are documented (medical certificate, statement by supervisor); and
4. The circumstances are notified as soon as they arise.

It is in your interest to control the scope of the project so as to be able to meet the research deadlines as well as other commitments (e.g., coursework, field placements).

Stage 1
The year preceding your registration in PSYC7126

October/November: A list of potential academic supervisors from within the School of Psychology will be made available to students. Upon receipt of this information students are advised to: begin
seriously considering possible research areas from those suggested by supervisors; begin reading in areas identified by potential supervisors; speaking with possible supervisors about potential projects; documenting any agreements relating to the willingness of a supervisor to oversee your project.

November: Complete the form supplied detailing preferences for supervisors and email it to Emmalee O’Grady (Postgraduate Administrator) by November 1st. The School attempts to achieve an equitable distribution of staff thesis supervision loads across Fourth Year, and Masters. In order to achieve this it will not usually be possible for all students to receive their first preference; however, if you have been in communication with a supervisor and an agreement has already been reached regarding their willingness to supervise you it is possible for this to be taken into consideration during the allocation process. In order for this information to be considered it must be documented on the preference form.

December-February: In December the School will write to you advising of supervision arrangements and co-supervision arrangements. As soon as you are notified you should begin liaising closely with your supervisor in designing the project, including finalising the topic, determining relevant theoretical background, designing the procedure, and sourcing of participants. At this time it is essential to identify research partners involved in data collection and to request letters of support. These will be required as part of the ethics procedures. You are advised to communicate with your supervisor using the Brief Research Proposal format. Ultimately a version of this BRP (described in detail below) will be submitted for assessment by the Program Director. Details of the format of the final BRP to be submitted can be found below.

Stage 2
Semester 1, when you are enrolled in PSYC7126

Feb/March: Meet with your supervisor and begin work on your BRP. Submit a draft of your BRP to your supervisor and when finalised present your BRP to your Supervisor and Co-Supervisor (see section 3.2 Preparing Your Thesis Panel Presentation below).

April 1st: Students will be required to submit their BRP to the Program Director via the Psychology General Office on Level 10. Research should not begin until formal approval has been given by the Program Director. In the event that a student feels they are ready to begin collecting data before April 1st, upon finalizing their BRP during the panel presentation stage, they may submit their BRP for early approval by the Program Director.

Late June: You should be in regular contact with your primary supervisor throughout the course of your project. In late June you should undertake a mid-project review with your supervisor to ensure that your progress is satisfactory. If your supervisor is concerned that progress is unsatisfactory, your project will be reviewed by the Program Director and, in consultation with your supervisors, a course of action will be decided to ensure completion of your project within the designated time. A second panel meeting can be arranged at this time to discuss progress and deal with any problems that may have arisen if you or your supervisor believe this would be of benefit. By this time the literature review should be completed, data collection is well underway, and a draft of the Method section is complete.

Semester 2, when you are enrolled in PSYC7127

August: Data collection should be completed, a draft of the Introduction written, and analysis commenced.

September: final draft of introduction, methods and results sections available for supervisor. A second draft should be prepared and completed at least two weeks before the final deadline.

October: Week 12 submit your thesis by 4pm Friday (see section 3.3 Preparing Your Thesis below).
3.1 Preparing your Brief Research Proposal

You are required to write a Brief Research Proposal describing your proposed research project and submit it to the Psychology General Office to the attention of the Program Director by April 1st. The purpose of this document is to convince your reader (ultimately the Program Director) that you have formulated an interesting and achievable research plan which will address explicit and refined research questions.

Your proposals should be clear, concise, fully referenced, and easy to read. You should be making a compelling case for the Program Director to approve your proposal. Your BRP should include the following sections:

- **Aims** – these should be clear, appropriate and match with method.
- **Background** – demonstrates your knowledge of the field of research, critically analyses previous research clearly identifies gap in literature, has a good smooth and logical progression towards the identification of your specific research questions, and has a narrowing or funnelling structure which leaves the reader in no doubt that what you propose is the best and most obvious next step in your field of research.
- **Proposed Research (method)** – details an appropriate, clear method matching with aims, describes the population of interest, the recruitment procedure, identifies appropriate ethics bodies, operationalises key variables, and convinces the reader that you know what you are doing and that it can be achieved.
- **Significance & Innovation** – brief statement of the applications and benefits of the research contextualised appropriately.
- **Unique Contribution** – in order for a thesis project to be approved the Masters Committee must be convinced that the work you will be doing will be sufficient to meet program requirements. This is particularly important where a student is joining an existing project or accessing existing data. In all instances the student must demonstrate sufficient intellectual and “hands on” contributions in the execution of the project such that their efforts are commensurate with those constituting an 8 month research project. These should be described in this section of the proposal.
- **References** (not included in character count).

The brief research proposal should be no more than 20 000 characters (roughly 5 pages single spaced) excluding references. You should consider readability when formatting your document. The full reference list included at the end should comply with APA referencing standards. The amount of content presented under each heading should be distributed as is appropriate for your project. For example, if you are using a complex experimental design or sampling procedure be sure to take the space to convince your reader that you know what you are doing, have thought through the details, and have proposed something which is achievable. If your study is relatively straightforward your characters may be better used in the background and significance sections. Irrespective of the nature of your project you must present sufficient background information to explain why your project is necessary and appropriate.

You need to get feedback on your BRP from your primary supervisor and your colleagues prior to the panel presentation (see section 3.2 Preparing Your Thesis Panel Presentation below). We suggest that you start developing your BRP early (and briefly at first) as a means to clearly communicate your research directions to your (potential or actual) supervisor. Thus the BRP is a living document that changes with the development and refinement of your ideas. To that end, consider sending your supervisor a one page BRP in preparation for your early (but not necessarily first) meetings. Suggest after you have spoken to them initially that you send them one or two BRPs that you can choose between, discuss and refine at future meetings. This forces you to think practically and refine your
ideas rather than putting your supervisor in a position where they have critique nebulous and ill-defined research questions and designs. It will also show you to be well prepared, thoughtful and have initiative – using the document to set a framework for your future discussions and providing a mechanism for quickly bringing your supervisor up to speed prior to your meetings.

### 3.2 Preparing your Thesis Panel Presentation

Your Thesis Panel Presentation is a brief presentation (30 minutes) including yourself, your supervisor and co-supervisor outlining the rationale and method of your proposed research undertaken prior to the BRP being submitted April 1st to the Program Director. This is an excellent opportunity to receive feedback on your project and answer any questions regarding the proposal. These presentations often raise issues that have been missed during the planning stages, or helps to troubleshoot methodological challenges.

It is intended that this presentation – together with the review of your BRP - constitute the formal review process which results in the final approval of your research idea as something achievable and appropriate. Research cannot commence until either a Panel Presentation or Panel Meeting has occurred and resulted in project approval from the Program Director. Following the presentation and once you have made any recommended changes to the BRP recommended by the Supervisor and Co-supervisor, this can be submitted to the School Office on Level 10 as a hard copy marked to the attention of the Program Director. BRPs are due April 1st.

### 3.3 Preparing your Thesis

Your thesis should be prepared as a submission for a named journal, and you should follow the recommendations of the journal except where they conflict with these guidelines.

- Identify a journal which would be an appropriate home for your thesis (your target journal). In most cases there are several journals which would be suitable - it doesn't matter which you select provided it is appropriate for the subject material.
- The journal should be a well-respected journal publishing standard-length articles. In your proposal you should indicate which journal you have in mind and this should be approved by your supervisor.
- Read the “guidelines for authors” provided by the target journal. For many journals the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed. 2009) will be your bible in the preparation of the manuscript. See http://apastyle.org/index.aspx for further details.
- Include in your thesis a mock letter of submission to the editor of the target journal (the APA publication guidelines may help with this letter).

Copies of recent Masters theses written as a journal article are available from the School Test Library (Mathews Building Room 803). Given that your Fourth Year Honours thesis will normally have been written in the conventional format for an empirical dissertation, you are advised to look at submitted Masters theses to see what is required.

Your thesis should be approximately 7,000 words in length (including abstract but excluding references and appendices). In practice we recommend you aim for between 7000 and 8000 words. Ignore any word limit imposed by your target journal. Examiners are told to reward clear and concise writing.

- You may include figures, tables, etc., either (a) in the main body of the text rather than at the end of the document, or (b) at the end of the text as per a normal journal submission
- Your thesis should be double-spaced and all referencing should be in APA format. Print on only one side of the paper and set wide margins.
- You should include a title page indicating that what follows is a thesis submitted for your degree and giving the name of your supervisor(s) and their affiliation.
You should include the Certificate of Originality (see APPENDIX).
Printed appendices should only include materials which would normally be printed in the journal. If you wish to provide other materials you can include these on a DVD in a folder in the back of the thesis but be aware that the examiner might not look at these.
It isn’t necessary to provide the examiner with all SPSS data files, output etc. (but see below)
You may also include a separate Acknowledgments page if you wish. Long and sentimental tributes should be avoided, but you may feel that you wish to include acknowledgments which are slightly longer than those normally given within the manuscript, although the latter should be included as appropriate.

3.4 Submitting your Thesis

You are required to provide your supervisor with a printed copy of your thesis and an electronic copy. In addition you must provide your supervisor with a copy of all materials, and data files.
You are required to provide the School thesis library with an electronic copy of your thesis. The preferred format is pdf, but a Word document is also acceptable. Email the thesis to our test librarian, Caterina Manea-Ward. This should be sent on the day you submit your thesis.
Print at least three copies of your thesis. Two of these must be submitted to the General Office and one to your supervisor. Where appropriate you should also supply copies to your external supervisor or partner organisation.
The General Office will supply binders for the two copies of the thesis you submit.
Your thesis must be submitted to the General Office before 4.00pm on the due date. Please note that we do not normally allow extensions to the thesis deadline and the standard penalty (2% per day) will apply for late submissions.

3.5 Assessment

Once marked you will receive a percentage mark and corresponding grade for your thesis. It contributes 25 percent to the overall grading for the Master of Psychology degree.

APPENDIX

The following statement, signed by the student, should be included on a separate page between the title and acknowledgment pages:

Certificate of originality
I declare that:

This assessment item is entirely my own original work, except where I have acknowledged use of source material such as books, journal articles, other published material, the Internet, and the work of other student/s or any other person/s. This assessment item has not been submitted for assessment for academic credit in this, or any other course, at UNSW or elsewhere.

I understand that:

The assessor of this assessment item may, for the purpose of assessing this item, reproduce this assessment item and provide a copy to another member of the University. The assessor may communicate a copy of this assessment item to a plagiarism checking service (which may then retain a copy of the assessment item on its database for the purpose of future plagiarism checking).

Signature __________________________ Student’s Name __________________________