USC GIST Program Thesis Format and Presentation Guidelines

This short guide accompanies the style guide for the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (AAG) and also a document template, available in both MS-Word and PDF versions. Taken together, these three documents are the official guidelines for both reference formatting and document formatting for theses in the USC Geographic Information Science and Technology (GIST) program.

These three documents also make reference to the *Chicago Manual of Style* (CMS) 15th edition. One of the books used in SSCI 594a, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian et al., is based on the CMS 15th edition. It is referred to as “Turabian et al.” throughout these guidelines and the document template.

When this guide or its accompanying template uses the word “must,” it indicates a few simple rules that all theses in the GIST program must follow. When this guide or its accompanying template uses the word “should,” it indicates formatting ideas that are in general good practices. However, these may be altered for specific thesis content at the discretion of the thesis advisor/chair.

In addition to these requirements, when you are finished with your whole thesis process, please e-mail the final PDF copy, as uploaded to the Graduate School, to Melissa Salido <msalido@dornsife.usc.edu) with a cc: to your thesis advisor/chair. Be sure to include an MS-Word copy of your Abstract and five key words that best describe your thesis. This will ensure timely placement on the Spatial Sciences Institute (SSI) website.

**REFERENCE FORMATTING**

Each thesis must follow the reference style given in the style sheet for the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (AAG). In general, the AAG style sheet adopts the CMS 15th Edition “Parenthetical Citations-Reference. For a model of this format see the examples in the document template and in the AAG style sheet. For further details and models of citation formats for many different kinds of sources see Turabian et al. Chapters 18 and 19 on parenthetical citations-reference list style.

The text and information used for the document template is acknowledged to be either directly from the USC website or invented. It is not presented as a model for the appropriate number and type of citations for a thesis, but rather simply as a guide to formatting. For information on the requirements of citation see Chapter 15 of Turabian et al. on citation practices.
DOCUMENT FORMATTING

**Front Matter**

The following front matter must be included in every thesis:

- Title Page
- Table of Contents
- Abstract (300 word maximum)

The format for the Title Page and for the Table of Contents demonstrated in the document template must be carefully followed.

The following front matter is optional, but should be included in every thesis where it is applicable:

- Epigraph
- Dedication
- Acknowledgements
- List of Tables
- List of Figures
- List of Abbreviations

**Chapter Names and Subheadings**

Each thesis must be divided into more than one chapter. Each chapter must have a name. Typical chapter names are: Introduction, Related Work, Methods and Data Sources, Results, and Discussion and Conclusions. These chapter names are demonstrated in the document template. The precise names and number of chapters should be chosen to suit the thesis content, and as such is completely at the discretion of the student and the advisor/chair.

Chapter names must be included in bold font and all caps with center justification at the top of the first page of each chapter. In general, there should be text in the chapter that precedes the first sub-heading of the chapter.

Sub-headings should be used within each chapter to the extent necessary. Consult with your chair/advisor. The document template demonstrates formats both a non-numbered and a numbered scheme for sub-headings.

**Back Matter-References**

Every thesis must include a section entitled References containing all the sources cited in the thesis. All sources cited in the thesis must be listed in the References section, and there must not be any sources in the References section that are not included as in text citations in the thesis.
**Back Matter-Appendices**

The use of appendices is optional. The document template demonstrates the use of an appendix. In GIST theses, an appendix is often appropriate for a portfolio of maps or for extensive data tables that would needlessly break the flow of the thesis text. When content is appropriate, theses should use one or more appendices to preserve the flow of the main manuscript. Consult with your supervisor/chair.

**Fonts and Spacing**

The thesis must use a single, typical and easily legible font. The font is sometimes bolded and sometimes italicized, but otherwise remains the same style and size throughout. The single font applies to all text in the thesis, including: chapter heads, sub-heads, data in tables, and captions for figures and tables. The *Times New Roman 12-point font* is suggested and is used in the document template.

As demonstrated in the document template, the thesis must use double-spacing in the body of the text.

The thesis should be justified at the left margin and allowed to run unevenly at the right margin.

Indentations and line spacing between chapter heads, chapter sub-heads, tables, and figures is demonstrated in document template and should be followed.

All other matters of spacing are at the discretion of the student as approved by the thesis advisor/chair. Turabian et al. has guidance on spacing in Chapter 21 on punctuation.

**Tables and Figures**

Many GIST theses include a variety of tables and figures. Maps should typically be called “figures” in the text. All tables and figures must include captions, and where taken from other sources must include appropriate source citations. The source citations should follow the in text reference format for the Annals/CMS parenthetical-reference list style.

The models given in the document template for formatting of tables and figures should be followed. Tables and figures should be included close to related text in the thesis. Tables and figures should also be cited in the text and explained or narrated there. It is suggested to use automated caption and cross-referencing features in MS-Word if there are a large number of tables or figures.

For more formatting conventions for tables and figures see Chapter 26 of Turabian et al. on tables and figures.
Equations

Equations should be prepared using the Equation Editor and start with a ½ inch indent on the left margin and they should be numbered sequentially from (1) to (n) throughout the thesis itself. The various terms and variables included in these equations should be described on one or more lines below each equation starting with "where x = something, y = something, and z = elevation in meters ..." before continuing with additional text.

Other Matters of Form

The style guide for the Annals of the AAG specifies a number of conventions for particular terms common to GIST theses as well as a few spelling and punctuation conventions. These conventions should be followed in GIST theses.

When not superseded by the Annals of the AAG style guide, Turabian et al. provides extensive coverage of good practices in accordance with the CMS style guide. In general, these practices should be followed in the GIST theses. Such styles are described in Turabian et al. in Chapter 20 (spelling), Chapter 23 (numbers), Chapter 24 (abbreviations), and Chapter 25 (quotations).

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