

Chapter and section previews

Chapter previews are short introductory paragraphs in the beginning of each chapter before sections begin. They serve the same purpose as the table of contents, describe the contents of the chapter, but in full sentences. They can also briefly motivate why the topic is important (e.g., some mathematical properties are needed later in the algorithm) or connect the chapter to research objectives (e.g., if one research objective was to compare classification accuracy of two models empirically, you can recall it in the beginning of chapter “Empirical evaluation”). In a MSc thesis, a chapter preview is typically one paragraph (or at most two) ¹

Similarly, in the beginning of each section having subsections, you can introduce the contents in couple of sentences and if a subsection is divided into subsubsections, just one sentence suffices. If you feel need to write an excessive preview to explain something before proceeding subsections, it hints that some important subsection is missing (consider a subsection called ”Overview” or ”Main approaches to sg” etc.)

The previews are an optional element of the thesis, so consider if you should rather spend your writing energy on the actual contents or add the previews afterwards. If you decide to use them, you should use them systematically, i.e., each chapter and section has them or none has. The previews should also be balanced, so that previews of each chapter have about the same length, likewise all sections and subsections.

The previews are often easiest to write afterwards, when you know what to introduce and you will more likely write them in a balanced manner. However, sketching chapter previews beforehand can help you to stay focused while writing (a sketch may be simply a bullet list that you write out later). If you write complete previews beforehand, there is a danger that you put actual contents there and they spoil the structure. (Hint: check if all information content remains after removing previews. If it doesn’t, you may need a new section or integrate the missing information to some existing section.)

¹The length of the previews depends on the volume of the work; books with long chapters have also longer previews, while research papers have very short previews or none at all. In a MSc thesis, where each chapter is typically 10–15 pages, the previews cannot be very long.