

Guidelines for handling your own previously published research results in dissertations submitted to Faculty 03

(as of December 2025)

– created based on a template from the University Library of the Technical University of Munich^[1] –
In accordance with the decision of the Grand Doctoral Committee of December 17, 2025

Foreword

This guide is intended to clarify how to handle your own previously published research results in your dissertation. It is now common practice for research results to be published as part of a doctoral project before the dissertation is written, for example, in the form of citable journal articles or preprints. Since these results represent an important part of the work, they are discussed and contextualized in the dissertation and thus published a second time. This guide is intended to prevent misunderstandings and uncertainties when dealing with possible secondary publications, text recycling, and copyrights.

Task and purpose of references to published results

When writing a dissertation that contains previously published results as "secondary publications," both the legal aspects (right of citation, copyright, right of use) and the standards and customs of the respective scientific community ("good scientific practice") must be observed.

- Legal aspects

When publishing articles, the author enters into a contract with the respective publisher in which the exploitation and usage rights are regulated. How restrictive these contracts are with regard to use in secondary publications—for example, in a dissertation—depends heavily on the publisher and the chosen licensing model (e.g., "open access"). Some publishers permit secondary publication in dissertations. Nevertheless, it must always be checked which version of the article and in what form the article may be used (e.g., as a manuscript, in the journal layout, or in the final published version). If entire sections, illustrations, or the complete article are to be reproduced, it must be checked whether the author's contract permits this. If necessary, explicit permission for the intended use must be obtained from the publisher. This applies in particular to dissertations in which the original publication is to be reprinted, e.g., in a cumulative dissertation or as an appendix.

In the introductory statement on the independence and originality of the dissertation, a suitable sentence should explain that permission to use the material has been obtained or granted by the publishers. The author is responsible for documenting this permission.

- Scientific ethics

In the case of scientific literature, readers assume that the results of the work

- 1) originate from the author,
- 2) are correct and complete,
- 3) are being published for the first time.

It follows from point 3 that all content that has already been published must be cited. If a dissertation revisits the author's own previously published findings, this constitutes a secondary publication. In this case, the rules of good scientific practice require that appropriate references and source citations clearly indicate which content has been taken over and from which publication it originates. Correct citation serves, on the one hand, to protect the work and intellectual property of others and, on the other hand, to ensure that it is clear and transparent which findings are new and which were already known—including from one's own publications.

Recommendation

The reuse of one's own previously published results in a dissertation constitutes a form of text recycling. The almost verbatim or direct reproduction of texts from one's own conference posters, as well as technical, apparatus, or experimental method descriptions, is often considered uncritical. However, verbatim reproduction (including direct translation between English and German) is problematic if no reference is made to the original publication. It is the author's responsibility to avoid problematic forms of text recycling. A general reference to existing first publications, for example in an introductory sentence (e.g., "Parts of this chapter have already been published in journals X and Y"), is an acceptable form of disclosure. In the dissertation, the first publication is cited in the same way as other citations in the work. Care must be taken to ensure that precise wording, clear structuring, and consistent citation practices make a clear distinction between "already known" and "new." It must be clear where new findings or additional considerations are introduced. This usually means that the text must refer more frequently to the first publication in order to clearly distinguish new, independent content (without reference) from already known, published results.

Please do not try desperately to rewrite your texts to give the impression of a new text, but clearly and openly state which content has been published previously and which is new. Provide appropriate and complete references to the original publications.

In short: write and label transparently and do not try to make old texts or results appear new.

When **including the complete article (cumulative dissertation** or in the appendix), the author's contract (e.g., copyright transfer agreement) must be checked and, if necessary, explicit permission for the intended use must be obtained from the publisher. The article you're using must be clearly recognizable: ideally (if allowed), you should mark it by reproducing the article directly in the original layout of the publisher's publication (see Figure1).

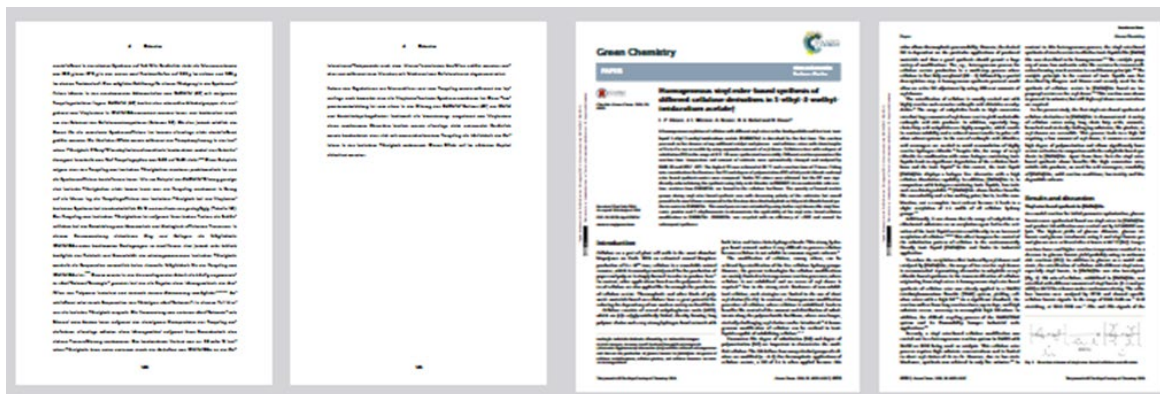


Figure 1 : Example of embedding your own complete publisher's publication in your dissertation. The publication (the two images on the right) must be clearly distinguishable from the dissertation.

When **using your own illustrations** from your own publications, it is recommended that you include a note in the caption with the corresponding citation, e.g., "The illustration was taken from journal [X]" or "The illustration was taken in modified form from journal [X]." Here, too, the author's contract must be checked.

Bachelor's or master's theses written in connection with the dissertation and supervised by the doctoral candidate are not publications. They should be cited as follows: "N. Mustermann, Bachelor's thesis "Title of thesis," University of Stuttgart, 20XY, unpublished results."

Definition

Direct quotation	Published formulations are protected by copyright. The unaltered reproduction of a text fragment with reference for the purpose of discussing the content of the statement is permitted – typically in quotation marks and in any case with a source reference. Reproducing your own published formulations verbatim is not a direct quotation, but a secondary publication.
Indirect quotation	Copyright does not protect the idea, but the form of an idea. Therefore, content may be formulated in a different form, but the source of the idea must be referenced (indirect quotation).
Plagiarism	Deceiving readers about the origin of an idea, achievement, or text—this refers to the work of others that is used as a template but not cited.
"Self-plagiarism"	Deceiving readers about the novelty or originality of a text – this refers to one's own work that is used as a template but not cited.
Text recycling	The reuse of one's own previously published texts, which are marked with a reference to the original publication.

Relevant links

[TUM citation guidelines](#)

[DFG "Guidelines for Ensuring Good Scientific Practice," 2019](#)

[Copyright Act § 38 Contributions to collections](#)

[1] Technical University of Munich University Library (2025) TUM Citation Guide.