

ADVICE FOR WRITING M.A. THESIS

1. Thesis lengths: minimum 50 pages, plus introduction and conclusion. Try to limit your focus to a project that is doable given this page range (save longer projects for PhD). If you are considering doing PhD work, you might think of one of the thesis chapters as a future writing sample to submit when applying to doctorate programs (usually 15-20 pages long). Consider extending seminar papers and/or work done in independent studies.
2. Devise a reasonable timeline for writing the thesis, discuss this timeline with your thesis Chair, and try to stick to your timeline to avoid extending graduate work beyond two years. (Milestones: select a Chair and a second departmental reader by Spring semester of your first year; extra-departmental reader by Fall of second year at the latest; clarify topic by end of Spring semester in your first year; read a lot on this topic over the summer; give draft of first chapter to committee in early Fall of second year; write second chapter over Winter Break second year; Spring semester continue drafting/polishing chapters until you have a defensible version.) Note: timeline pacing depends upon number of chapters you're planning on writing. Each chapter will require an average of two readings by each committee member (i.e. two drafts) before they can be approved.
3. Select a Chair who specializes in the period, writer(s) and/or theory you'd like to focus on in your thesis. Select second readers who can complement your Chair's knowledge, by providing supplemental insights (i.e. theoretical perspectives relevant to your project, knowledge of period you're working in and/or about writers relevant to one(s) you're focusing on, extra-literary cultural contexts, interdisciplinary perspective, etc.). Feel free to ask Director of Graduate Studies and/or Director of Literature for their advice regarding how to select thesis committee members. Once you have decided on a committee, fill out a "Masters Committee Appointment Form" and give it to the Director of Graduate Studies.
4. Make sure to file an "Application for Graduation Form" with the Graduate school by the deadline required for your intended graduation date (first week of February for Spring graduation, first week of October for winter graduation). Send an email with the names of the members of your committee to the Director of Graduate Studies, who will then file your committee with the Graduate School.
5. Consider writing the introduction (and conclusion) *last* rather than starting the composition process with this.
6. Try to avoid excessively specialized theoretical jargon in your writing, and be sure to clarify terminology as you go. Remember, one of your committee members will be from faculty outside the English department.
7. Early in the semester you plan to graduate, meet with your Chair to discuss a prospective defense date, your progress towards completing the thesis, etc. Contact all committee members well in advance to collectively decide upon a defense date that will work for everyone. Schedule a room for the defense (contact Cady in the English Department regarding who to speak with about this).
8. When preparing your defensible draft of the thesis, use the formatting requirements listed on the Graduate School website under "Formatting Thesis and Professional Paper." Your Chair should submit a defensible draft of your thesis via e-mail to the Graduate School – you should give this draft to your Chair at least 8 days before your defense. During your defense you will be given a "pass," "pass with revisions" or "fail" designation. Revise the thesis based upon faculty feedback during the defense (be ready to take some notes!). Submit a final draft to your Chair, who will then forward it to the Graduate School electronically. Upload your final copy of the thesis to Scholarworks for Thesis by following the instructions on the Graduate School's website.
9. Once your thesis has been successfully defended, ensure that the Department has signed off on your graduate application.