

M.A. THESIS

The M.A. Thesis is a research project designed to give you experience writing a focused, in-depth work of scholarship.

I. **Purpose(s):** There are many reasons students may want to write an MA Thesis, including:

1. Opportunity to pursue extended research on a topic, text, author and/or set of theoretical problems that you find compelling. Scope for going beyond seminar paper length.
2. Opportunity to discover the history of a literary text's critical reception and to contextualize your own interpretation within an ongoing scholarly conversation.
3. Experience researching and writing in-depth scholarship as preparation for doctoral work.

II. **Scope:** The M.A. Thesis should be 50-80 pages long, and should include an introduction, 2-3 chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. Theses over 100 pages long are discouraged.

III. **Process:**

1. Students should decide on a topic for their thesis which is focused and can be adequately covered within length requirements. This topic might extend work begun in a seminar paper and/or enable you to explore questions arising in a seminar at greater length. Examples of successful thesis topics have included a single author and/or a single text, a specific theoretical issue, or a constellation of texts engaged with a particular historical event. *We recommend that you try to decide on a topic by the end of the first year*, which will enable you to read extensively on that topic during the summer in preparation for writing the thesis.
2. Consult the "M.A. Thesis Timeline" as a basic guide for pacing the project and enroll in thesis hours (LIT 599). These hours may be taken whenever you choose, for a total of 6 credits.
3. Consider which faculty might be best suited to serve on a committee given your project's topic. Consult with the M.A. Lit Director regarding faculty who might be qualified to serve on your committee. Your committee must have a chair, a second in-department reader, and an outside (extra-departmental) reader. Be sure to *specify* which role you are asking a faculty member to serve ("chair" or "second reader"). In some cases, a thesis can be co-chaired.
4. Write a prospectus of your project to circulate to faculty who might be interested in serving on your committee. The prospectus should include a 1-2 page summary of the thesis topic as well as a bibliography.
5. Arrange meetings with prospective faculty who you would like to serve on the committee.
6. With your chair, establish a timeline for completing drafts of thesis chapters. Have an ideal defense date in mind and work backwards from this date. Keep in mind that the chair and (possibly) the departmental second reader will need to see *multiple drafts* of chapters. Although it is less common for extra-departmental faculty to oversee multiple drafts, this may be required. Consult with both second readers to clarify their expectations regarding this. Keep in mind that the pre-defense version of the thesis must be approved by all committee members at least *two weeks* before your defense date, and you must submit this version to the graduate school at least *one week* before the defense.
7. Consult the Graduate School website for important graduation deadlines, formatting requirements for the thesis and for paperwork that needs to be filled out for final thesis approval.

PORTFOLIO OPTION

Written Component

The portfolio includes three revised papers that were initially written in seminars (or in other courses taken for graduate credit). The papers should be seminar-length papers, that is, papers of 15-20 pages.

The portfolio also includes a brief introduction of about 10 pages. The introduction should present a narrative of the work the student has done in bringing together the revised papers: a story about the place of the papers in the student's intellectual development. The student, for example, may want to talk about the way the papers hang together, or about larger theoretical concerns that shape the papers, or about what he or she has learned in the revision process.

Oral Component

There is a portfolio defense exactly analogous to a thesis defense. The student is expected to present the portfolio as a whole and to respond to questions about it from members of his or her portfolio committee.

Process

Here are directions for a student who would like to undertake the portfolio option:

First. Ask a faculty member to chair your portfolio committee. This professor will supervise the work of revising the three papers in the same way that a thesis chair supervises the work of writing a thesis.

Second. Give your chair a 5-page preliminary prospectus that describes the portfolio you want to put together: the papers it will include, the kinds of revisions you think are necessary, the larger concerns you hope to address. You want to make sure that you and your chair are on the same page.

Third. In consultation with the chair and other faculty, form a portfolio committee. This committee, like a thesis committee, should have at least three members, one of whom is the chair, one of whom is from outside the English Department.

Fourth. Go to work. Stay in touch with your chair as you revise the papers. The timeline for the portfolio option is the same as the timeline for the thesis option.