

## Theses and Degree Papers

M.A.-English, M.A.-Writing, M.S.Ed.-English Education, and M.A.-Second Language Acquisition (TESOL Track) Programs

**Overview:** Research requirement options vary by degree program and track, as follows.

M.A.-English, Creative Writing Track: thesis.\*

M.A.-English, Literature Track: thesis or one degree paper.

M.A.-English, TESOL Track: one degree paper.

M.A.-Writing, Rhetoric/Composition Track: thesis or one degree paper.

M.A.-Writing, Technical Writing Track: thesis or one degree paper.

M.S.Ed.-English Education: thesis or one degree paper.

M.A.-Second Language Acquisition, TESOL Track: two degree papers.

\*Under very special circumstances, a Creative Writing student may choose to write a degree paper. But prior written permission from the Creative Writing Coordinator is required.

Those students who have the choice of either a thesis or a degree paper should consult carefully with faculty as they decide how best to satisfy the research requirement.

Note: Any research that requires human subjects, whether it is part of a thesis or a degree paper, must be cleared by MSU's Institutional Review Board (<http://ora.missouristate.edu/IRB.htm>).

**Due Dates:** Each semester, the Graduate College establishes a date by which students graduating that semester must submit finalized theses and degree papers. This date is typically two to three weeks before the last day of the semester. (See the English Department Graduate Calendar for dates.) Students, in consultation with degree paper or thesis readers, must arrange work schedules that will enable them to finish by the due date established by the Graduate College. Students should also note that most members of the graduate faculty are on nine-month contracts and may not be able to work with students during summer.

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### **Option 1: Degree Paper:**

The degree paper is usually a 25- to 30-page research project. One may think of it as a seminar paper (a long paper written for a course) that has been not only expanded but also researched, argued, and revised according to the most rigorous standards.

A student may revise and expand a paper completed for a course, or a student may choose to write a degree paper for a course in which he or she is currently enrolled. If a student wishes to do the latter, then the student should confer with the instructor early in the semester (by the third week) to seek permission.

A degree paper must come out of a class within the track that a student has chosen. (An exception to this rule can be granted only if a student obtains written permission from the faculty coordinator of the track.) Also, the paper's first (main) faculty reader must be the instructor in whose course the project began. After obtaining this instructor's provisional agreement to serve as the degree paper's first reader, the student should consult with the instructor about choosing a second faculty reader for the paper.

But before beginning the process of expanding a course paper into a degree paper, a student must (1) write a degree paper proposal, (2) distribute a copy of the proposal to each reader, (3) obtain a signed copy of the proposal from each reader, and (4) submit both signed copies (stapled together) to the Graduate Director. The student should also retain personal copies of the signed proposals.

**DEGREE PAPER PROPOSAL:** The degree paper proposal will of course describe both completed work and work that remains to be done. The proposal should be concise and include the following.

- (1) a discussion of the research problem/investigation;
- (2) a description of the method and of anticipated or actual results;
- (3) a timetable of remaining readings, meetings with readers, and deadlines when drafted and completed sections of the work will be submitted to the readers;
- (4) a preliminary bibliography, including primary and secondary sources; and
- (5) signature lines for both readers.

The first three sections will require a page or less each; the bibliography may extend to several pages, but it need not be exhaustive.

A student will work closely with the first reader in planning, researching, and writing. The student should expect a degree paper to evolve through several drafts. Students sometimes

wrongly assume that the degree paper is identical to the one written for the seminar. In the majority of cases, this is not true.

When the two readers are ready to approve the completed degree paper, the student must submit a "Seminar Report Form"

(<http://english.missouristate.edu/assets/english/SeminarReportForm.pdf>). No fewer than seven days before the Seminar Report Form is due in the Graduate College, the student should deliver the form, along with a copy of the final version of the degree paper (for the department's files), to Angie Anderson in the English Department office. These documents will be kept in Angie's office while the form is awaiting the readers' signatures. **THE STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR (A) NOTIFYING HIS/HER READERS BY EMAIL, NO FEWER THAN SEVEN DAYS BEFORE THE FORM MUST BE DELIVERED TO THE GRADUATE COLLEGE, THAT THE SEMINAR REPORT FORM IS AWAITING THEIR SIGNATURES IN ANGIE'S OFFICE; (B) FOLLOWING UP TO MAKE SURE THAT THE READERS SIGN THE FORM IN TIME; AND (C) DELIVERING THE SIGNED FORM TO THE GRADUATE COLLEGE BY THE DEADLINE. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD A STUDENT ASK ANGIE TO PERFORM THESE DUTIES.**

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## **Option 2: Thesis:**

A thesis topic must fall within the purview of a student's academic track. (An exception to this rule can be granted only if a student obtains written permission from the faculty coordinator of the track.) Also, the project's first (main) faculty reader must be an instructor from the student's track.

A student who chooses to write a thesis should (1) determine that a member of the graduate faculty in student's academic track is willing to direct the study; (2) confer with the instructor about a plan of study, second and third readers, timetable, and anticipated outcome; (3) write a proposal per the guidelines below; (4) distribute a copy of the proposal to each reader; (5) obtain a signed copy of the proposal from each of the three readers; (6) submit all three signed copies (stapled together) to the Graduate Director. The student should also retain personal copies of the signed proposals.

In most cases, the student will bring to the first conference with the first reader an idea for a thesis project; together they may reshape this idea and formulate a preliminary plan for work on the project. Only when a proposal has been approved by all three readers and submitted to the Graduate Director may a student enroll in ENG 799: Thesis. Students must form their thesis committees and submit approved proposals during the semester before they intend to enroll in ENG 799.

As noted above, students must obtain permission from the Graduate Director in order to enroll in ENG 799. A thesis-writer typically takes 6 credits of ENG 799. If a student wishes to take all 6 of these credits in one semester, then the student enrolls in section .006; or, if a student wishes to take 3 credits in one semester and 3 credits in another semester, then the student will ultimately enroll twice in ENG 799, section .003.

**THESIS PROPOSALS FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS:** The thesis proposal should be concise and include the following:

- (1) a discussion of the research problem/investigation;
- (2) a description of the method to be applied and of anticipated results;
- (3) a timetable of readings, meetings with readers, and deadlines when drafted and completed sections of the work will be submitted to the readers;
- (4) a preliminary bibliography, including primary and secondary sources; and
- (5) signature lines for all three readers.

The first three sections will require a page or less each; the bibliography may extend to several pages, but it need not be exhaustive.

THESIS PROPOSALS CREATIVE PROJECTS: A student in the Creative Writing Track of the M.A.-English Program will write a creative thesis—for example, a translation, a novel (or a portion of one), or a collection of short fiction, poems, or essays. Adapting the model outlined above, the proposal for a creative thesis should do the following:

- (1) describe the nature and dimensions of the projected work,
- (2) provide a timetable,
- (3) include a brief bibliography relevant to the theory and practice of writing in the chosen genre, and
- (4) provide signature lines for all three readers.

Should a student wish to change some major aspect of his/her thesis, the proposal may be revised in writing with the approval of the first reader.

Some students may wish to apply for special thesis funding offered by the Graduate College ([http://graduate.missouristate.edu/thesis\\_information.htm](http://graduate.missouristate.edu/thesis_information.htm)).

A student should expect the thesis itself to evolve through several drafts. Usually, the thesis advisor works closely with the student through all stages of research and writing. The second and third readers may wish to become involved after one or more revisions have been completed. There is no set procedure, though, and the role of any member will depend upon the preferences of the readers and the needs of each student. Students are expected to make all of the revisions recommended by committee members. Students are also expected to turn in all drafts already spell-checked and carefully proofread. Faculty may decline to read work that does not meet minimal professional and academic standards.

A student should allow the committee reasonable time to read and respond to drafts. The student should not assume that the thesis committee is aware of due dates; the student is responsible for communicating these dates to readers.

The typical length of a Master's thesis is 50 to 80 typed, double-spaced pages. A thesis consisting of poetry should include 500 to 800 lines of verse. A creative writing thesis should include a critical introduction.

All three members of a thesis committee must approve the completed thesis. Furthermore, the thesis and accompanying paperwork must be prepared and submitted according to the Graduate College' guidelines ([http://graduate.missouristate.edu/thesis\\_information.htm](http://graduate.missouristate.edu/thesis_information.htm)). After the committee has accepted the thesis and signed the Thesis Signature Page, the student will submit to the Graduate College Office a review copy (see below) and Thesis Signature Page (on bond paper). At this time, the student should also ask the advisor to remove his/her "Z" or "I" grades for ENG 799.

No fewer than seven days before the thesis and its accompanying paperwork are due in the Graduate College, the student should deliver the Thesis Signature Page to Angie Anderson in the English Department office. The Thesis Signature Page will be kept in Angie's office while it is awaiting the readers' signatures. **THE STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR (A) NOTIFYING HIS/HER READERS BY EMAIL, NO FEWER THAN SEVEN DAYS BEFORE THE THESIS AND ACCOMPANYING PAPERWORK MUST BE DELIVERED TO THE GRADUATE COLLEGE, THAT THE THESIS SIGNATURE PAGE IS AWAITING THEIR SIGNATURES IN ANGIE'S OFFICE; (B) FOLLOWING UP TO MAKE SURE THAT THE READERS SIGN THE THESIS SIGNATURE PAGE IN TIME; (C) MAKING SURE THAT THE THESIS AND ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS ARE PROPERLY PRINTED AND FORMATTED; AND (D) DELIVERING THE SIGNED THESIS SIGNATURE PAGE, THESIS, AND OTHER ACCOMPANYING PAPERWORK TO THE GRADUATE COLLEGE BY THE DEADLINE. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD A STUDENT ASK ANGIE TO PERFORM THESE DUTIES.**

One copy of the approved thesis must be submitted to the Graduate Office for review approximately two weeks before the end of the semester. (See the English Department Graduate Calendar for the specific deadline.) The student must follow the Graduate College's guide to formatting and submitting the thesis ([http://graduate.missouristate.edu/thesis\\_information.htm](http://graduate.missouristate.edu/thesis_information.htm)). Once the thesis is reviewed by the Graduate College, the student will be asked to pick up the copy and will receive a memo outlining changes (if any) that need to be made. The student will have approximately two weeks following graduation (a specific date will be noted on the memo from the Graduate College) to make any requested corrections and submit final copies.