

MASTER'S THESIS GUIDE

The master's thesis is one of three culminating experience options towards the completion of the MA degree. It constitutes an analysis of a specific topic that engages with the existing literature and which makes an argument supported by evidence and using the methodologies of the discipline.

You will have one faculty member as a thesis advisor who will read and approve the final version of your thesis. (Students wishing to have their thesis read by a second faculty member may contact the graduate advisor to make this request.)

Eligibility

Students **must** have a 3.75 GPA and the commitment of a faculty advisor in order to choose the thesis option. Students who do not meet the GPA requirement cannot select the thesis option.

The department offers a thesis class in the fall in order to guide students through the thesis writing process. This course is **NOT** required in order to pursue a Thesis. Students not interested in the course are welcome to work directly and independently with their thesis advisor.

Students who do enroll in the course will still be required to identify a thesis advisor and must work with him/her individually to complete the thesis. Taking the course alone does not guarantee that a student has been approved to write a thesis.

Thesis Proposal

****Students interested in taking the Thesis Course offered in the Fall will be required to submit a proposal as part of their application to the course. Students not interested in taking the course are **not required** to create a proposal, but are strongly encouraged to do so****

You should begin with a short proposal (500-750 words, 3 – 5 pages) that defines your topic and approach. This will help you and your advisor have a clear vision of your proposed topic. A thesis proposal should have a tentative title, a discussion of your topic, argument, the kind of questions you seek to investigate, and the contribution you feel your analysis of this topic will make to the field. It is not expected that you will know all these answers before you have actually written your thesis, but a proposal should nevertheless begin to suggest them. It can be particularly helpful if you are working from a paper that you have written and submitted for a class.

Select a topic that is manageable within the limited framework of an MA thesis: to wit, 10,000 – 12,000 words, roughly 40 – 50 pages. Take the concept of a journal article as the model to work towards.

Topics are yours to define, but they should aim to be as specific as possible. For example, a student interested in book publishing will want to narrow the subject temporally, geographically, or by genre in order to give the research workable parameters. A student who works in visual culture might compile a 'visual archive,' a collection of images that will be at the heart of the thesis—this could center on one

image with other supporting images, or it could be a collection of images to compare or some combination.

Your thesis proposal should contain the following sections:

Research Question/Topic

Identify the major question, issue or problem the thesis will attempt to address. This should be a clear and succinct formulation of a researchable question.

You might ask yourself: what theoretically-relevant question do I want to answer with my research? What do I want to learn that I don't already know about Media, Culture, and Communication?

Background/Rationale

Provide the necessary background and justifications for your research. Clearly state and describe the approach; mention appropriate references to the relevant literature.

You might ask yourself: which theories of media, culture, and communication will I use to frame this study and why? What are the limits or boundaries of this inquiry? What theoretical and/or practical issues (whether social, economic, political, individual, etc.) will this thesis address and why? What is original about your research?

Methodology

Identify and justify the specific methodology you will use to answer the research question. Reflect on the broad analytical approach you will use and on the school(s) of thought or models of scholarship that will inform your investigation of the problem. Comment on the kinds of information you will need to address the research question. Also specify the steps you will use to collect and interpret that information.

You might ask yourself: what sources will be reviewed and how will information from these sources be used? Why would these methods of gathering and analyzing be best suited to this thesis project? How will I analyze media content? If I plan to conduct interviews, who will be interviewed? What questions will I ask and how will I gain access? If I employ observation as a methodology, what social contexts will be observed and how will data be organized?

Bibliography

Identify the sources that you will draw from to inform your thesis, both theoretically and methodologically.

Note: there are a number of ways to correctly cite sources; choose one style and be consistent.

Working with a Thesis Advisor

- After a faculty member has agreed to serve as your thesis advisor, schedule a meeting to discuss your schedule for completing your thesis. You should articulate the level of interaction needed (how often you would like to meet, at what points you need feedback on your writings, etc.); it is your responsibility to reach out to faculty.
- You should follow this, and any other meetings, with an email summarizing the agreed-upon schedule and other decisions.
- Many faculty are away during certain periods for conferences or university breaks; do not assume that your advisor will be available to read or approve your thesis during a particular time frame unless you've made arrangements in advance.

- Always offer to deliver a printed copy of your writing; do not assume that a document sent via email is sufficient.
- Always include your name, the date, page numbers, etc. on everything you submit to your advisor.

Thesis Structure and Format

A thesis is typically comprised of:

- An introduction
- A short literature review
- A discussion/analysis of your topic supported by evidence
- A conclusion
- A bibliography (include all the sources that you used and read).

You should make clear in your introduction what your methodology is, what comprises the broader data sources that you are drawing on to make your argument (books, journal articles, images, websites, interviews, etc.), and the significance of the research question.

It is important to remember that a thesis makes an argument by means of examples: it does not survey a field, a history or otherwise narrate a story.

A literature review should make clear that you are well grounded in the existing literature that is relevant to your project. In the case of an interdisciplinary topic in media, culture, and communication, this often means defining three to four overlapping and interconnecting literatures that are important to your argument. A literature review should not summarize texts, but rather should engage with the particular representative texts, concepts, and arguments that are most important to your project. While it may make sense to use a literature review to critique those aspects of existing theoretical arguments with which you disagree, it is more useful to focus on those concepts that you find most useful to your project.

The final thesis must be typed, double spaced, formatted with normal margins, and have a title page. Illustrations must be identified in the text and have captions. Submission of other materials, eg. Film, slides, artwork may accompany the written thesis but may not substitute for it. Consult your advisor in choosing a style guide for citing your work. Common styles used in media, culture, and communication are MLA, Chicago, and APA.

Thesis Completion and Approval

Drafts of your thesis (or sections of your thesis) should be submitted throughout the semester. It is up to you and your advisor to develop an appropriate schedule. A complete penultimate draft must be submitted to your faculty sponsor by mid April for spring theses and Mid November for fall theses. The graduate advisor will send out exact dates at the early part of each semester.

When you are near completion:

- 1) Contact the graduate advisor who will assist your faculty sponsor with the grade submission
- 2) Download and complete the thesis approval form (including signatures from your faculty sponsor)
- 3) Submit the form and a final copy of your thesis to the graduate advisor by the indicated deadline.

