Graduate Thesis Resources and Guidance

Table of Contents

Introduction

A thesis is an original, formal work that, among other options varying by program (e.g., Internship, Manuscript, Comprehensive Exam), may serve as the culminating experience of a graduate program. In accordance with the Graduate Catalog, your thesis, which you will craft under the advisement of a thesis director and thesis reader(s), should offer evidence of your original research or creative activity. It may be either an approved creative project or an interpretive, analytical work. In completing the thesis, you will demonstrate a capacity for independent scholarly activity, an ability to organize and present information logically, and proficiency in the use of scholarly language. The final thesis will demonstrate originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate format and organization, and thorough documentation. An oral defense or presentation of your thesis may be required for some programs, and the program handbook, Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC), or thesis director can provide discipline-specific guidance.

Following the Thesis Committee review process, you should have a well-prepared, well-supported, well-written, and well-formatted document that has been checked for adherence to the expectations and conventions in your discipline, conformity to applicable thesis specifications presented in this document, plagiarism, and similar requirements. You will submit a Word® file of this well-crafted thesis using the [Thesis Submission form](). This submission will trigger an approval process to officially document the approval of the thesis reader(s), thesis director, GPC, and the School of Graduate Studies (SGS). Note: The Thesis Director will guide you through the process with your committee, and you should **not** submit the document until your Thesis Director indicates you are ready. You can learn more about this submission process in Milestone 6 of the Research Milestones (p. 8).

The review by the School of Graduate Studies will ensure that the necessary approvals are properly recorded by the automated process and the format of the document conforms to the specifications presented below. Additionally, there may be a final review for adherence to the Academic Integrity policy (e.g., plagiarism). The School of Graduate Studies may request additional information or input from the Thesis Director if concerns are noted, and violations will be addressed consistent with the policy presented in the Graduate Catalog. If you are concerned about the format of the document, you may request a preliminary review before submitting the document by emailing the document to Danney Rasco (danney.rasco@salemstate.edu) or the School of Graduate Studies (graduate@salemstate.edu).

Note: The thesis or any excerpts from it may **not** be published in any form in books, periodicals, or journals **prior to** completion and acceptance by SGS. **After** the thesis has been accepted, material from it may be published with proper citation of the thesis to avoid self-plagiarism. Presentations at conferences and similar activities that typically precede final publication are acceptable before you submit the thesis document assuming they are supported by your thesis director.

Thesis Specifications

Physical Requirements

Margins: The margin should be 1" on left, right, top and bottom of page.

Page numbers: Every page in the thesis must be numbered except the title page, including prefatory materials and appendices. Use small Roman numerals for the front matter and Arabic numerals for the text (text must begin with page 1), which will require you to split the document into two sections **and** unlink the two sections once the second is added.[1]

Type: Size, Fonts, and Spacing

The typeface, spacing, in-text citations, references, headings, appendices, figures, tables, and similar elements should consistently conform to the appropriate style (e.g., APA, MLA, ASA, Chicago) based on the student's degree and the thesis director's recommendation.

Headings need to be properly formatted using Styles in Word to allow screen readers to work properly, which will help individuals with disabilities be able to access your document.

If you include a table of contents, please use the built-in Table of Contents tool under References so that it can be automatically updated in case page numbers change in the revising and formatting process.

To start a new page, please use a page break (Ctrl + Enter) rather than adding new lines.

When the discipline-specific style guides are silent, please adhere to the following:

Use a standard typeface of 10-, 11-, or 12-point size with superscripts and subscripts no more than 2 points smaller than the font used for the body of the text.

You may use larger size type for the title of the thesis and for chapter headings, as long as it is not larger than 18-point. Reduced type may be used within tables, figures and appendices.

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[1] Note: The hyperlinked text in this section will take you to resources provided by Microsoft to guide you through the related steps.

Do not use italic (script) print except for foreign words, book and journal titles, and special emphasis.

Print must be double spaced, although single spacing is allowed in bibliographies and notes.

Creative Formats:

Assuming a proposed thesis meets the requirements outlined in the Graduate Catalog, theses with alternative formats will be considered. However, the thesis director, thesis reader(s), and a representative of the School of Graduate Studies need to evaluate the proposed activities in relation to the Graduate Catalog requirements and disciplinary expectations **before** the graduate student begins the thesis.

To ensure clear and documented communication, a written request (approximately 1 page) should be submitted to the thesis director via email with the reader(s) and School of Graduate Studies (graduate@salemstate.edu) copied. Then, a meeting (in-person or computer-mediated [e.g., Zoom]) will be scheduled **if** needed to discuss the idea further before providing a final approval to begin the project. The request for an alternative format should:

1. outline the planned project and the format of the deliverable(s),
2. discuss how the project aligns with the program and the student's future career plans, and
3. provide supporting documentation for the activity being common in the specific discipline.

Title Page

The title page is the first page of the thesis (see sample on p. 7). Salem State University and School of Graduate Studies must appear as the first two lines on the title page. The third line should contain the name of your department. In addition, be careful to use the correct title of your degree program on the line that reads "A Thesis in_____."

Use your legal or preferred name as it appears on your records in the Registrar's Office. Your name must appear in exactly the same form each time it is used in the thesis (e.g., title page, signatory page).

If you choose to use a copyright line, you may begin it with either the word "Copyright" or the copyright   symbol ©. It should be followed by the year and your name.

Designate the degree you will be receiving, for example:

Master of Arts

Master of Business Administration

Master of Arts in Teaching

Master of Science

Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in Education

On the date line, indicate the month and year of degree conferral, not the date of the defense or the date you submit your thesis. The month typically will be August, January, or May.

Signatory Page

In lieu of a signatory page, approval of the document by the director, GPC, and SGS will be obtained and archived using an automated approval process hosted in Microsoft Power Automate. A backup of the approval information will be hosted in a document in a SharePoint site maintained by the SGS.

Submitting your Thesis to the School of Graduate Studies

Following the program approval process, please submit the document to the School of Graduate Studies (SGS). Note: This submission process is required and formally documents the approval of your thesis director and other reader(s).

Following your submission,
1. You should receive an automated confirmation message that the document was received.
2. The document will be sent to your committee members, so they can indicate their approval.
3. Approval from the Graduate Program Coordinator in your discipline and a representative of the SGS will be requested.
4. Assuming everyone approves the submission, the automated process will
    i. Store a copy of your thesis with SGS,
    ii. Archive key information (e.g., title, thesis director),
    iii. Send a copy of the thesis to the Digital Repository, and
    iv. Notify the Registrar's office so your university record is updated.

After you receive the congratulatory email that your thesis was approved, **CELEBRATE**!

Thesis Resources

Thesis Tips

Completing a thesis can be a daunting task, and in many cases, you will learn as much about the research process, project management, and personal and professional growth as the content into which you delve. Consequently, we offer the following advice (clichéd and otherwise; plus, discipline-specific resources in the appendices):

1. Communicate with your thesis director early and often.
2. Schedule a regular time for your thesis. **Breaking your thesis into smaller tasks** (see Research Milestones, p. 8) and **scheduling time daily** to work on your thesis will result in better progress (and a better product) than trying to tackle the whole project at once. There will be times when you need to sit for hours to see the big picture, bring elements together, proofread the document from start to finish, and so forth. However, a daily habit of spending 60 to 90 minutes on your thesis (e.g., reading related articles, writing two or three paragraphs, outlining a section, running a participant) will move the needle faster than trying to find a 7-to-9-hour block, which tends to be difficult to find and inconsistently/rarely obtained.
3. **Know your current purpose or emphasis**. Are you reading? Are you planning? Are you writing? Are you editing? If you try to switch back and forth between tasks, especially between writing and editing, it will take more time to complete your tasks.
4. **Avoid perfectionism**, especially early in the process. As many people have joked, "a good thesis is a finished thesis." We want your final product to be amazing, **and** we know that all theses (and other research and creative projects) have weaknesses, limitations, and so forth. Also, we know that your first draft will be rough - it is called a *rough* draft for a reason. You have a team of

people (classmates, thesis director, reader[s]) to help you refine your ideas and how they are presented. Talk with your thesis director about their expectations, but typically, you will need to get comfortable providing a draft, receiving feedback, and following through on the feedback – no perfectionism needed.[2]

5. Keep copies. As you plan the writing process, spend a few minutes thinking about how you will **track** and **backup the versions of your project**. The thesis writing process is iterative, and as you refine your ideas, you may find that information you thought was tangential is important. If you saved the version with the information, you could quickly pull it for the new version of the document. If you simply deleted it, … ugh. Additionally, if there are questions about previous recommendations from a reader or director and how you addressed those recommendations, it can be helpful to document them and the corresponding changes without cluttering the most recent version.

6. Be accountable to yourself. At the individual level, hold yourself accountable for regular (e.g., daily) commitments to reading, writing, analyzing data, and so forth by **blocking your calendar and treating the commitment as non-negotiable** as other any other meeting.

7. Be accountable to your peers (optional), thesis groups can be beneficial if they are well-structured and focused. The purpose or goals of the meetings will vary from discipline to discipline and change as the focus of your work on the thesis changes. Still, the need to **intentionally discuss the goals of the meeting** and **limit how much time is devoted to commiserating** will remain constant.

    a. At the beginning of the group, set a limit on commiserating with each other. It can be helpful to discuss the frustrations of writing, collecting data, and so forth with a group of people who truly understand, and especially if the conversation focuses on addressing those frustrations and sharing tips, it can be beneficial. However, it is easy to spend an hour complaining without seeing a benefit. Consequently, **setting a timer for 10 minutes** (or so) and **keeping the discussion solution oriented** will benefit everyone.

    b. When you plan a specific meeting, **agree to the goal(s) for that particular session** (e.g., quiet writing, editing, supporting, commiserating, rehearsing).

    c. **Think about how to best accomplish the goal for the session**. For example, if you are editing each other's work, it may be more beneficial to add comments and suggestions in a shared document (e.g., OneDrive, Google Drive) before the meeting and use the meeting time to discuss the suggestions.

    d. In fairness to your peers, **use a timer** if you plan to provide feedback for multiple people in the same day to ensure everyone has the same time for feedback on their draft or presentation.

8. Be accountable to your thesis director, this arrangement will look different from discipline to discipline, but generally, you need **consistent, intentional, focused meetings** with your thesis director. These meetings are commonly scheduled one to four times per month during the active phases of the thesis (e.g., planning, writing, collecting data). Toward the end of each meeting, plan goals – specific action steps - for the period between meetings (e.g., read 10 articles, write 3 pages). Then, review those goals as you start your regular (e.g., daily) individual work sessions and the next meeting with your thesis director.

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[2] This comfort with the feedback process will help you throughout your career. If you create a report, colleagues will provide feedback; if you write a book, someone will edit it; and if you propose a solution, team members will help you refine it. Gaining a sense of comfort with receiving and responding to feedback will propel you forward in your career. Also, if you are working on a thesis, we can safely assume you are intelligent, motivated, detail oriented, and so forth, and we can safely assume you are human, your ideas and your presentation of them can be improved, and so forth. These two truths exist together, and it is okay. They exist together for all of us.

Finding and Organizing References

There is considerable variability from discipline to discipline about how to find information, evaluate the reliability of references, and organize the retained references. Still, many students will find the following helpful:

> The Quick Start guides for Zotero and similar reference managers,
>
> Academic Essentials guide from the Berry Library, and
>
> Discipline-Specific Guides (e.g., https://www.psichi.org/page/132EYEWin09dLai) for the literature review process.

Disseminating your Findings and Writings

There are many ways to share your findings and writings – the thesis being one. However, you may find other outlets suitable too, and they can provide an opportunity to engage with the broader scholarly community as you present at Research Day - hosted by the Center for Research and Creative Activities each year; prepare a poster, symposium, or paper for a conference; write a manuscript based on your work; create an infographic for a state agency or non-profit organization; and so forth. In many cases, you will need to prepare an abstract for your submission and learn about printing a poster or presenting at a conference. There are differences in the expectations from discipline to discipline though, so check with your thesis director and find discipline-specific resources.

As a reminder, the thesis or any excerpts from it may **not** be published in any form in books, periodicals, or journals **prior to** completion and acceptance by SGS. **After** the thesis has been accepted, material from it may be published **with proper citation** of the thesis to avoid self-plagiarism. Presentations at conferences and similar activities that typically precede final publication are acceptable before you submit the thesis document assuming they are supported by your thesis director.

Salem State University
School of Graduate Studies
Department of History

Salem Politics and Government, 1890 – 1940

A Thesis in History

by

Jane Doe

Copyright 2024, Jane Doe

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

May 2024

Research Milestones

As a note, these milestones provide general guidance about common steps in a quantitative research project and may not apply to other types of theses. Additionally, even with a quantitative research project, you will likely need to tailor and adjust them for your purposes. Please check resources specific to your field and **individualize the steps with input from your thesis director**.

Milestone 1: Developing Idea and Drafting Annotated Outline and Abstract
1.1   Read literature, organize notes about sources (e.g., articles, chapters) using Zotero, Excel, or another method
       1.1.1 Write notes for each source read, even a quick note about an article you do not want to use will save you time possibly reading it twice.
       1.1.2 Note important concepts, theories, measures, manipulations, covariates.
       1.1.3 Meet with thesis director regularly to discuss insights, questions, and progress.
1.2   Identify major themes and concepts among sources.
1.3   Consider connections between concepts and draft research question(s).
1.4   Meet with thesis director to discuss research question(s).
       1.4.1 Create general outline, possibly with assistance from the Writing Center.
       1.4.2 Identify possible committee member(s) (i.e., reader[s]).
1.5   Develop outline; add details and subsections; consider order of concepts for lit. review.
1.6   Use outline to organize notes; Create annotated outline.
1.7   Use outline and research question(s) (or hypotheses) to write abstract.
1.8   Send draft of annotated outline and abstract to thesis director.
1.9   Revise outline and abstract with thesis director feedback

Milestone 2: Drafting Literature Review
2.1   Use notes from each source with annotated outline to begin developing literature review.
2.2   Merge notes together and create draft of literature review, possibly with assistance from the Writing Center.
2.3   Discuss literature, research question(s) (hypotheses), and possible methods with thesis director.
2.4   Print*, proof, and revise literature review. *I know *printing* is old school, but it makes a difference (e.g., https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/107769580806300103).
2.5   Identify measures and manipulations that could be used.
       2.5.1 Write list of needed materials/resources (e.g., participants, research assistants, copyrighted material, equipment)
       2.5.2 If resources are needed, explore the available internal and external funding options with your thesis director (e.g., https://www.salemstate.edu/academics/research-hub/student-research-support/graduate-student-support, https://www.salemstate.edu/academics/research-hub/support-faculty-research/funding)
2.6   Send draft of literature review to thesis director.
       2.6.1 Meet to discuss draft.
       2.6.2 Revise draft with thesis director feedback and possibly with assistance from the Writing Center.

Milestone 3: Planning, Preparing, and Writing Methods
3.1   Use notes about methods, measures, and manipulations as starting point.
3.2   Discuss research plan (methods) with thesis director.
3.3   Write draft of methods, send to thesis director, and revise with feedback.
3.4   If working with people (or data from people) or animals, prepare the appropriate applications for the Institutional Review Board (IRB; https://www.salemstate.edu/offices-and-services/sponsored-programs-and-research-administration/institutional-review-board) or Institutional Animal Care

and Use Committee (IACUC; https://www.salemstate.edu/offices-and-services/sponsored-programs-and-research-administration/institutional-animal-care-and-use-committee-iacuc).

       3.4.1 You can find resources to help you decide if approval is necessary (e.g., https://elearning.salemstate.edu/courses/1110675/pages/do-i-need-irb-review)

       3.4.2 Include measures, manipulations, recruitment procedures, etc.

       3.4.3 Create documents (e.g., informed consent, questionnaires), potentially online in SurveyMonkey or similar platform (https://ask.salemstate.edu/kb/create-new-salem-state-surveymonkey-account).

3.5   Revise methods and IRB or IACUC proposal; Send thesis director drafts.

3.6   Complete CITI training for IRB if required (https://about.citiprogram.org/)

Milestone 4: Proposing

4.1   Submit revised proposal to thesis director and other committee member(s) and follow proposal approval process for your program.

4.2   Revise proposal based on feedback from thesis director and other committee member(s).

4.3   After committee approval of proposal, submit IRB or IACUC applications if approval needed.

Milestone 5: Finalizing the Thesis

5.1   With necessary approvals (director, committee, IRB, IACUC), practice protocol; then, start data collection.

       5.1.1 Schedule room for sessions if needed.

       5.1.2 Announce study (e.g., send emails, make class announcements).

       5.1.3 Schedule sessions if running participants in-person individually.

5.2   Check and screen data with thesis director.

       5.2.1 Clean data.

       5.2.2 Run preliminary analyses (histograms, skewness, kurtosis, etc.).

       5.2.3 Address assumption violations.

       5.2.4 Run descriptive stats for participant section.

5.3   Run analyses for hypotheses; Consider how covariates can be included.

5.4   Write draft of results and send to thesis director with original and clean data to check reproducibility.

5.5   Write draft of discussion section.

5.6   Revise results.

5.7   Revise discussion section.

5.8   Combine revisions of sections; Revise full thesis and ensure it meets the Thesis Specifications outlined earlier in this document.

5.9   Submit revised thesis to the thesis director.

5.10   Use feedback to revise thesis.

5.11   Once approved by the thesis director, follow the program approval process (e.g., submit thesis to committee, schedule oral defense if required, prepare defense presentation if required).

Milestone 6: Submitting to School of Graduate Studies

6.1   Following program approval process, please submit the document to the School of Graduate Studies (SGS).

       Note: This submission process will formally document the approval of your thesis director and other reader(s). Following your submission,

5.   You should receive an automated confirmation message that the document was received.

6.   The document will be sent to your committee members, so they can indicate their approval.

7.   Approval from the Graduate Program Coordinator in your discipline and a representative of the SGS will be requested.

8.   Assuming everyone approves the submission, the automated process will

    v.   Store a copy of your thesis with SGS,

    vi.   Archive key information (e.g., title, thesis director),

     vii. Send a copy of the thesis to the [Digital Repository](), and

     viii. Notify the Registrar's office so your university record is updated.

6.2 After you receive the congratulatory email that your thesis was approved, **CELEBRATE**!

Tips for Research Theses

As a note, these tips provide general guidance that should help graduate students completing a <u>quantitative</u> research project and may not apply to other types of theses.

Summarizing Sources

As you identify and read potential references, it is important to keep track of the key information and how it relates to your own thesis, even if the note is simply "Do NOT Use." You can organize these notes in several ways (e.g., Zotero, Excel document, Word document, physical or electronic files), and a bit of forethought about how you will organize information and the types of information you want to track for each source (e.g., author[s], title, DOI) will be helpful. In that regard, you can use a few questions **or** sections to guide your notes. As a starting point,

Guiding Questions

What is the author's (authors') primary purpose or assertion?

What major terms and theories were introduced?

How do the ideas presented connect with the proposed thesis?

How do they reinforce, refine, or inform the findings from other thesis references?

How do they conflict with the findings from other references?

How do they provide insights into the nuances of the terminology, concepts, and theories?

Guiding Sections

Constructs, variables, & operationalization

Hypotheses & associations between variables/constructs

Participant characteristics & sample size

Research design, procedures, manipulations & data collection methods

Results & connection to hypotheses

Issues, concerns, & limitations

Applications & connections

Relevance to proposed thesis

Planning and Writing a Literature Review

Planning and writing a literature review often involves an iterative, collaborative, individualized process with your thesis director. However, there are some generally useful activities:

Upgrade your skills in Microsoft Word® or the word processor you intend to use,

Consult guides on the process of writing a literature review (e.g., https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/reviewofliterature/, http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/conclusion), and

Explore the common sections of a literature review in your discipline and the associated content. As an example,

    Introduction

        Provide larger context/value for research (Sell it, hook the audience)

        Identify focus using topic sentence

        Clarify the scope of the review; outline the topics of the literature review

        Present the conclusion (research question)

    Body

        Determined by relevant topics, theories, etc.

        Present the topics in the same order as the introduction

        Be sure to present related literature that may counter your expectation

    Conclusion

        Identify gaps or conflicts within the literature

        Connect those gaps/conflicts to your research question

        Present clear, explicit hypotheses (expectations) related to research question

Collecting and Managing Data

Once you know the data you intend to collect, it is important to create a data management plan before your research starts. This plan should cover how you will code data, store and archive data, share data with collaborators and others, protect the data, and backup the data to avoid losing it.