

Thesis Proposal Guidelines (Fall 2017)

Purpose of the MA thesis proposal:

MA students who elect to write a thesis are required first to write a proposal that is approved by their advisor and the Thesis Proposal Committee. This proposal serves several purposes: 1) It prompts each student to develop a detailed plan for their project, 2) it offers each student the opportunity to solicit early feedback and guidance from English faculty, and 3) it lays the groundwork for the prefatory essay required of all English MA theses. The thesis proposal is a working document. Although it should be carefully written and revised, it is meant to guide thesis work rather than dictate it. Each project will evolve over time in more or less significant ways. However, each project also needs a starting point from which to embark. The proposal provides that starting point.

Steps for writing and submitting an MA thesis proposal:

1. Choose a focus. Your focus should be something that interests you and may be something that you have already worked on in some capacity (e.g. on your own or in an English seminar or workshop). Take care to choose a focus that you can address satisfactorily within the time and page constraints of an MA thesis. Talk with your advisor about narrowing your focus.

2. Work with a faculty member to develop your proposal. Once you have chosen a focus, meet with a faculty member who works in your area (or an allied area) to discuss your idea. If you aren't sure with whom to meet, ask the MA director to refer you to the appropriate professor(s). Ask the faculty member if they think your idea is sound and if they would be willing to direct your thesis. (You may find that you need to speak to more than one professor and/or change your focus in light of faculty feedback.) Once a faculty member has agreed to direct your project, you should work closely with that person to develop your proposal. This process requires multiple drafts and meetings, so plan accordingly. Your director will also help you identify a reader for your thesis committee. Your director and reader must approve your proposal before it is submitted to the Thesis Proposal Committee.

3. Submit your proposal to the Thesis Proposal Committee. MA thesis proposals must be submitted for approval twelve months before thesis submission (i.e. those graduating in May must be approved by April of the previous year, and those graduating in December must be approved by the November of the previous year). Specific submission deadlines will be published each academic year. The Thesis Proposal Committee will review proposals at least twice each semester; students will be advised when those meetings will occur so they can submit their proposals to the English Department office for timely review. Students whose proposals are not approved will be given feedback and asked to revise under the guidance of their faculty directors before resubmitting. The thesis proposal cover sheet can be found [here](#).

MA Thesis Proposal Guidelines

In 750-1500 words (excluding the reading list), describe your thesis project.

For creative writing theses (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or mixed-genre):

Describe the structure of your creative work.

What choices have you made with respect to genre, point of view, chronology, setting, meter, rhyme, and/or figurative language? Why have you made these formal choices? Are you working in a specific poetic or narrative form? How does the form of your work relate to its content?

Describe the meaning or purpose of your creative work.

What are the intended themes of your work? What ideas or questions (aesthetic, philosophical, political, cultural) motivate your project? If your thesis emerges primarily from personal motivation, how is that motivation related to broader concerns? How do your formal choices express the meaning and purpose of your work?

Discuss the writers and writing that have influenced your work.

Which creative writers or works are stylistic influences for your project? Thematic influences? Ideological influences? How will your work emulate and/or depart from these influences? What critical works have shaped—or will shape—the way you think about your subject matter and craft?

Provide a reading list.

Include a reading list of all texts referenced in the proposal as well as texts you plan to study during the course of your thesis work. Minimum 15 texts. MLA format.

For scholarly theses (literature or pedagogy):

Describe your research topic.

What are the subject and scope of your thesis? What material will be addressed? What material will not be addressed? Why is your topic important (beyond personal interest)? What question motivates your investigation? What kind of research will this topic require?

Discuss the scholarly work that has been done on your topic.

What are the major studies on your topic? What critical or methodological approaches do those studies take and what are their main lines of argument? What gaps exist in the scholarship (that your project might fill)?

Describe your critical or methodological approach and proposed argument.

What critical or methodological approach will you take to your topic? If your methodology involves human subjects (e.g. through interviews), does it require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval? What theorists, scholars, or texts have influenced your approach (whether they address your specific topic or not)? What is your proposed question or provisional argument? How will you investigate your question or support your argument? How is your approach similar to or different from other work on your topic? What will your study contribute to the existing literature?

Provide a reading list.

Include a reading list of all texts referenced in the proposal as well as texts you plan to study during the course of your thesis work. Minimum 15 texts. MLA format for creative writing and literature theses. APA format for pedagogy theses.

Department Thesis Requirements:

All English Department MA theses must:

- Follow current MLA or APA formatting rules (see above)
- Include a prefatory essay
- Include a works cited section
- Meet the appropriation minimum page requirement*:
 - **Literature or Pedagogy:** 40 pages
 - **Narrative:** 40 pages
 - **Poetry:** 25 pages
 - **Mixed-Genre:** a 3-to-1 ratio—for example, 24 pages of narrative and 8 pages of poetry

*Minimum page requirements include the prefatory essay (at least five pages), but do not include the works cited section.

University Thesis Requirements

University guidelines for thesis preparation and submission should be followed to the letter. Please follow the link below and review these requirements very carefully.

<https://nmu.edu/graduatestudies/thesis>.

Timeline for June graduation

January-February: Meet with faculty member(s) to discuss thesis plans and begin drafting proposal

February-April: Work closely with director to draft and revise proposal. Once director and reader have approved, submit proposal to Thesis Proposal Committee in advance of advertised meeting dates. Revise and resubmit, if necessary.

August-April: Draft thesis, working closely with director on research and revision. (Writing schedule will depend upon distribution of thesis credits.)

April: Upon approval of director and reader, submit perfectly formatted thesis to Office of Graduate Studies.

Timeline for December graduation

August-September: Meet with faculty member(s) to discuss thesis plans and begin drafting proposal

September-November: Work closely with director to draft and revise proposal. Once director and reader have approved, submit proposal to Thesis Proposal Committee in advance of advertised meeting dates. Revise and resubmit, if necessary.

January-December: Draft thesis, working closely with director on research and revision. (Writing schedule will depend upon distribution of thesis credits.)

December: Upon approval of director and reader, submit perfectly formatted thesis to Office of Graduate Studies.