

Thesis Proposal Guidelines*

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 introduction 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 a graduate seminar). 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 November of the previous year). Specific submission deadlines will be published each academic year. 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 Requirements

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

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 or APA format (depending on your topic and specialization).

Department Thesis Requirements:

All English Department MA theses must:

- Follow current MLA or APA formatting rules (see above)
- Include a prefatory essay / introduction of at least 5 pages
- Include a works cited section
- Meet the minimum page requirement of 40 pages (excluding endnotes and works cited).

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 Winter Graduation

One year before expected graduation

January-February: Meet with faculty member(s) to discuss thesis plans and form a thesis committee, made up of one director and one reader. Seek guidance from the MA Program Director, if needed. Begin drafting proposal, working closely with committee. Apply for Excellence in Education Award to support summer research (optional).

February-March: Draft and revise proposal, working closely with committee. After committee approval, submit proposal to Thesis Proposal Committee by deadline (announced each year).

April: Revise and resubmit proposal (if required by Thesis Proposal Committee). Determine how many credits you will take for the thesis (4-8) and during which semesters. Enroll in Fall thesis credits (if applicable). Set an initial research and writing schedule with your director.

May-August: Begin research.

One semester before expected graduation

August-December: Set a writing and meeting schedule with your committee. Continue research and begin writing, working closely with both director and reader.

Semester of expected graduation

January-February: Finish drafting thesis, working closely with committee.

March: Submit complete draft to committee for review one month before final submission is due. Revise according to committee feedback.

April: After securing approval from committee, submit final version of thesis to College of Graduate Education and research, according to posted deadline.

Timeline for Fall graduation

One year before expected graduation

August-September: Meet with faculty member(s) to discuss thesis plans and form a thesis committee, made up of one director and one reader. Seek guidance from MA Program Director, if needed. Begin drafting proposal, working closely with committee.

September-November: Draft and revise proposal, working closely with committee. After committee approval, submit proposal to Thesis Proposal Committee by deadline (announced each year).

December: Revise and resubmit proposal (if required by Thesis Proposal Committee). Determine how many credits you will take for the thesis (4-8) and during which semesters. Enroll in Winter thesis credits (if applicable).

One semester before expected graduation

January: Set a research, writing, and meeting schedule with your thesis director and reader. Begin research. (Schedule will depend upon distribution of thesis credits.)

February: Continue research and begin writing, working closely with committee. Apply for Excellence in Education Award to support summer research (optional).

March-August: Continue research and writing, working closely with committee.

Semester of expected graduation

August-October: Finish drafting thesis, working closely with committee.

October: Submit complete draft to committee for review one month before final submission is due. Revise according to committee feedback.

November: After securing approval from committee, submit final version of thesis to College of Graduate Education and research, according to posted deadline.

*Revised Winter 2022