

A SHORT, PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE ACADEMIC THESIS

WORKING WITH A SUPERVISOR

Thesis supervision is an expected part of the workload of full-time faculty, and faculty are generally eager to work on theses in their areas of expertise and interest. (Limited-Term Appointments, however, are not expected to supervise due to their heavy teaching load.) Students should approach a potential supervisor by June of the first year of the program. Often, the thesis is the continuation of work done in one of your courses. You might also have in mind someone whose expertise is relevant to your project. If you have questions about selecting a supervisor, please feel free to discuss with the Graduate Program Director (GPD). Once you know your supervisor, you and your supervisor should meet to discuss your thesis goals, go over requirements and set up a work schedule. How often you submit, and in what quantity, will be determined by mutual agreement. Time for revision should be factored into the schedule. Work over the summer may be subject to less frequent meetings than work during the Fall and Winter terms.

The School of Graduate Studies has a general set of [guidelines](#) for graduate supervision. In addition to those guidelines, the Graduate Program adds the following supplemental information about expectations in the English Department:

- 1) Communication is important; please let your supervisor know when you anticipate submitting work, and they should let you know when to expect their comments. Normally a meeting is scheduled around the discussion of the comments. If a supervisor cancels a meeting, it should be re-scheduled immediately. Both supervisor and student should expect emails to be answered in a timely fashion. Contact your supervisor and/or the GPD if life events or other factors compromise your ability to maintain regular communication for an extended period.
- 2) Response to your work may come in oral or written form, or both. You should feel that your supervisor has read the work thoroughly, understood what you are trying to achieve, and offered concrete suggestions as to how to strengthen it. However, supervisors are not copy editors. Typos, and grammatical errors, should be corrected by you before submitting any draft.
- 3) Most supervisors require a minimum of two weeks to read submitted work. They may require **up to a month** during busy times of the semester. However, if a supervisor routinely takes more than four weeks, without giving an adequate reason why, please contact the GPD.
- 4) If you wish to meet a particular deadline (for graduation, work or travel plans), ensure that your work is submitted to your supervisor in a timely manner. They are under **no**

obligation to permit you to meet a particular deadline if your work is not of an acceptable standard, or if they are given too short a period in which to read, comment and approve the thesis. You may also be liable for any extra fees incurred due to an extended timeline of completion. (Section 6 of this [webpage](#) contains information about current Master's time limit extension fees.)

- 5) If, for any reason, a conflict arises with your supervisor, and direct consultation cannot resolve it, please contact the GPD. The GPD, in collaboration with the student and faculty supervisor, will attempt to understand the cause of the conflict and promote an amicable solution. If such a solution cannot be found, the GPD will aid you in finding another supervisor.
- 6) If your thesis changes significantly, and either you or your supervisor feels your work requires expertise from a different area, please contact the GPD, who will help you to find another supervisor.

IMPORTANT DATES: SUMMARY TIMELINE

Year 1

April 15 – Short Topic Proposal
June 1 – Confirm Thesis Supervisor

Year 2

September 30 – Thesis Proposal and Annotated Bibliography Due
January 15 – Deadline to Apply to Graduate for Spring Graduation
February 15 – Thesis Submission for Spring Graduation
April 1 – Deposit Thesis in Spectrum (for Spring Graduation)
July 15 – Thesis Submission for Fall Graduation
July 15 – Deadline to Apply to Graduate for Fall Graduation
September 1 – Deposit Thesis in Spectrum (for Fall Graduation)

SHORT TOPIC PROPOSAL

The topic proposal is a short statement of your proposed topic (100 words). It functions to identify the general nature of your topic for a potential supervisor. You can also show the document to the GPD if you wish to ask for advice regarding the choice of a supervisor.

THESIS PROPOSAL AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The proposal and annotated bibliography are the official declaration of your intent to write a thesis; writing the proposal and compiling and annotating the bibliography should help you contextualize and communicate your project and clarify your sense of how to proceed in the writing of it.

September 30th of your second year: Proposal and Annotated Bibliography:

This date is a **guideline** for the timeliest progress through the program. It is not absolute and can be adjusted in consultation with your supervisor. If, however, you have not submitted the proposal/annotated bibliography by the end of the fall semester of your second year, you need to inform the GPD.

The proposal (about 250 words) outlines the issues to be addressed in your thesis, along with methodology and theoretical approaches informing your approach. This document will also help you to produce the abstract required for your final thesis submission to Spectrum.

The annotated bibliography is the supplemental elaboration of your proposal with a review of the relevant scholarly material that you will use (and extend or reject) in your thesis. It can include essays, books, book chapters, and other forms of scholarship and literary criticism. The material should be chosen with an eye to inserting your thesis into current scholarly debates concerning your topic.

Annotated bibliographies in the recent past have varied between 15 and 30 entries, based on the nature of the topic. Your supervisor will help you set a goal suitable to your topic.

You can agree with your supervisor about the form of citations, and the Library makes the major citation guides available, [here](#). The Purdue Writing Center has a useful [webpage](#) about annotated bibliographies.

After approving the proposal/annotated bibliography, your supervisor should forward the documents to the GPD and GPA (Graduate Program Assistant) and inform them that you have passed this requirement. You will then receive credit for this part of your program requirements.

THESIS SUBMISSION DATES

As your thesis approaches completion, please bear in mind that your supervisor will likely ask for at least some minor revisions before sending the draft to the second reader. The revisions might be greater in scope if you have not regularly submitted work to your supervisor.

For spring graduation: Supervisor approval of thesis and submission to the second reader, **February 15th**. The final version must be submitted to Graduate Studies/Spectrum by **April 1st**. You must also apply to graduate by January 15th.

For fall graduation: Supervisor approval of thesis and submission to the second reader, **July 15th**. The final version must be submitted to Graduate Studies/Spectrum by **September 1st**. You must also apply to graduate by July 15th.

PARAMETERS

The academic thesis is around 10,000 words or 40 double-spaced pages.

FORMATTING

The page format should be double-spaced, in a standard font (Times New Roman 12 pt / Arial 11 pt), with one-inch margins. For the final submission to Spectrum, the title page, signature page, abstract, and acknowledgement/dedication page must be numbered in roman numerals. For more information about formatting and other thesis issues, see the guidelines outlined [here](#). You will follow a consistent citation format in the thesis. The MLA and Chicago styles are the two most widely used citation formats for literary scholarship. Concordia Libraries gives access to those style guides, [here](#). For any technical issues or questions please confer with the GPA (Graduate Program Assistant).

THESIS READERS

Your second reader will be determined in consultation with your supervisor and, in some cases, with the GPD, several months before you plan to submit your thesis. Your supervisor, or in some cases the GPD, will approach a prospective reader. While you are encouraged to recommend a reader whose expertise seems best suited to your project, involvement of your preferred reader cannot be guaranteed for reasons of faculty workload and availability.

The second reader should be given four weeks to read and comment on the work. Their comments are then submitted, in writing, to the supervisor. If the thesis is approved, these comments are then forwarded to the student.

(If the thesis is deemed NOT ready for submission to the Graduate Studies Office, your supervisor will resume work with you on a further draft. It is, however, the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that only work of acceptable quality is submitted, so this seldom happens.)

SPECTRUM

This is Concordia Library's online research repository, which includes all theses. Once you have completed your thesis you are expected to deposit in the Spectrum repository as an archival PDF. This has the advantage of long-term preservation of your thesis, the attribution of a unique DOI (digital object identifier) to it, and of your work's discoverability due to the metadata you will provide during the deposit process. As deposit in this open access repository may have implications for publishing parts of your thesis in the future, you may request to put an embargo on your work for a specified time, if desired.

Further questions about theses and Spectrum should be directed to the Thesis Office in the School of Graduate Studies: thesis@concordia.ca.