



Guidelines for Preparing the MA Thesis Proposal

The purposes of the MA Thesis proposal are: a.) to enable students to clearly articulate a plan for their research before they begin their work; and b.) for the supervisor and Graduate Program Committee to determine if the scope of the research project is appropriate.

MA students will submit a preliminary draft of the thesis proposal to the supervisor by the first day of the 13th month in program. After consultation with the supervisor, s/he will then submit the thesis proposal to the Graduate Program Committee by the end of the fourth week of the 13th month in program for review and approval. It is expected that the supervisor has provided the student with substantial feedback on and approves of the proposal that is submitted to the Graduate Program Committee.

The Graduate Program Committee's main tasks are to ensure that:

- the proposal is clearly written;
- the goals of the project are clear (and realistic within the given timeframe);
- the student has identified and is working to address a gap in the literature;
- the student has chosen and is able to justify a theoretical and / or critical framework;
- the work is situated within the relevant literature on the topic;
- the methodology is concise and the preliminary plan for data analysis is clear;
- potential conclusions and implications have been considered;
- students working with human subjects are aware of and obtain ethics approval before they begin their work; and
- the student and the supervisor have agreed on a realistic timeline for the project.

It is not the role of the Committee to approve of the theoretical and / or critical framework and / or writing style. It is ultimately the student and the supervisor who make such decisions.

For students who enter the program in September, proposals will be handed in to the supervisor by September 1st of the second year in the program. The student will then work with the supervisor on the proposal to prepare it for submission to the Graduate Program Committee by the end of the month of September. Students who enter in January will hand in proposals to their supervisor on January 2nd of the second year in the program in order to spend that month revising the proposal for submission to the committee by the end of the month.

This proposal should be approximately **1200-1500 words** in length and should be accompanied by an abstract and an appropriately detailed preliminary bibliography. Students should submit ONE paper copy to the Graduate Program Administrator and ONE electronic copy (Word version) to llac@ucalgary.ca by the stated deadline. The document will be reviewed by the Graduate Program Committee, following which students will receive notification from the Graduate Program Director indicating whether the proposal has

been approved or whether changes are needed. If the Committee determines that changes are needed, these will be clearly outlined by the Graduate Program Director, and a deadline for re-submission will be set. This will normally be one month from the date when the notification is sent.

MA Thesis Proposal Requirements

The following information should be included:

a. Title of the Project (Please be short and precise.)

b. Abstract

A concise (~200-word) description of the project.

c. Research Topic

A statement which includes the problem that the candidate intends to study. What is the central idea to be addressed in the thesis? How does it represent a gap in the field's current knowledge? The problem can be theoretical, critical, historical, or practical. The statement of the problem should be followed by a question or a related set of questions for which the thesis will attempt to find answers. Each question should be followed by a hypothesis (i.e., a reasoned, preliminary response to the question). The major texts / data to be analyzed (i.e., literary, cultural, linguistic, theoretical, etc.) should be briefly identified in this section. (Details will be provided in second (f.) below.)

d. Literature Review

A critical review of influential works on the topic. This may include, for example, three or four major works (i.e., books) or a substantially larger number of peer-reviewed articles on the topic. The goal of this section is to demonstrate how the project fits within the larger field.

e. Theoretical and/or Critical Framework

A description and analysis of the main theoretical concepts that will provide the basis of the study and/or that will inform the study. Some justification or explanation of this choice should be provided.

f. Methodology and Data Analysis

A description and justification of the methodological approach to be applied in your collection and analysis of the material at hand. For example, although three novels may have been mentioned in (c.) and the theoretical framework explained in (e.), the goal of this section of the thesis proposal is to provide an outline of the specific ways in which the materials will be chosen and analyzed. What are the primary textual materials / data that will be analyzed? Where will they come from? How will they be chosen / collected? Which approach to analysis will ensure that the central question(s) can be answered? You should consider providing a few examples to demonstrate the types of data to be analyzed and the appropriateness of the data analysis procedures. In addition to answering the questions above, you should also answer as many of the following questions as possible:

- What is the specific way in which you will choose / collect your materials / data in order to answer your research question(s)? Why is this the most appropriate way to do so?
- How will you analyze your data? How does this fit in with the specific theoretical / critical framework you have chosen? Why is this the most appropriate way of going about it?
- Which textual or rhetorical aspects, or theoretical matters derive from the research project, and how do they relate to the texts or issues proposed?
- Which conceptual ideas, literary, aesthetic, and / or linguistic theories or models support or contradict accepted critical understandings of the text(s) or data you have chosen to study? Consider, first, primary or central ideas and theories, and then consider secondary ideas or theories.

g. Organization of Chapters

An outline describing, to the best of your ability, the way the thesis will be organized in terms of its chapters. It is recommended that you look at the way in which similar theses written in the School have been organized. In so doing, consider the following:

- What defines the rationale for each chapter?
- What justifies the existence of each chapter?
- What sub-problem does each chapter address?
- What is the intent of each chapter within the overall framework of the thesis?

h. Conclusions and Implications

A statement of the conclusions anticipated as well as their potential implications. In particular, a focus should be placed on new information, ideas, concepts, etc. that are expected to emerge from the research undertaken.

i. Status of Ethics Approval

If you plan to work with human subjects (even if this only involves interviews) you must provide a statement regarding the status of your CORE training and ethics application.

j. Bibliography

A preliminary bibliography, including the (primary) works to be studied and the most current and /or relevant research on the topic.

k. Timeline

A clear and realistic month-by-month timeline that sets realistic expectations regarding how long each of the tasks associated with the thesis will take. This will serve as a yardstick for measuring your progress.