

# PhD Thesis Guide

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Introduction .....	4
What is a Thesis?.....	4
Thesis Advisory Committee.....	4
How often should I meet with my Supervisor?.....	5
How often should I meet with my Committee?.....	5
May I change my Supervisor? .....	5
What if I disagree with my Committee? .....	6
Are other faculty members allowed to advise me?.....	6
Proposal .....	6
What is the purpose of a proposal?.....	6
What are the components of a proposal? .....	6
Research Problem .....	7
Research Methods .....	7
When can I start my proposal? .....	7
Proposal Presentation.....	7
Proposal Approval.....	8
Changes to research plan after the proposal has been accepted?.....	8
Ethics Review .....	9
Ethics Application.....	9
WesternREM .....	9
Western's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board Guidelines.....	9
Revisions to Approved Ethics Proposals .....	9
Other School Boards/ Locations .....	10
Guidelines .....	10
Thesis Preparation & Format .....	10
Plagiarism.....	10
Thesis Examination .....	11
Forms .....	11
Scholarship@Western .....	11
Examination Committee .....	11
Preliminary Examination of the Thesis .....	12
Public Lecture.....	12
Examination .....	13
Final Submission.....	14

Thesis Timelines ..... 14

Thesis Defense Only Status ..... 15

## Introduction

The information provided below aims to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about the process of writing a thesis for the PhD in Education Studies program.

Students must familiarize themselves and adhere to the regulations set out in Section 8 of the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' Graduate Regulation: <https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/8.html>. This section outlines the university wide thesis regulations and procedures.

### What is a Thesis?

A thesis (or dissertation) is a formal statement of the theory, source materials, methodology, and findings of a student's major research project. It must be a complete and sufficient document that does not require subsidiary information to substantiate its findings. The examination of the thesis exposes the student's work to scholarly criticism. (School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies' Graduate Regulations Section 8.1)

A thesis is an extended research paper that:

- addresses one or more researchable questions
- draws on published research and theoretical literature
- seeks to address a gap in the knowledge about a topic or examines a topic in a new way
- is theoretically grounded
- is couched in proper English usage

### Thesis Advisory Committee

In accordance with SGPS regulations, every student writing a thesis must have a Thesis Advisory Committee. The Thesis Advisory Committee must have at least two members: the Supervisor and another member selected by the Supervisor. A student's Supervisor must be from the Faculty of Education but the committee member(s) may or may not be from the Faculty of Education. If there is a Co-Supervisor, no additional Committee member is required. Committee members must have membership in the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS). Contact the Graduate Office in regards to SGPS membership.

The functions of the committee are:

- to review, make recommendations and approve the proposal;
- to advise and supervise the development of the study;
- to receive progress reports;
- to require modifications deemed necessary;
- to evaluate the final draft of the thesis;
- to determine when the final draft is ready for the oral examination.

### **How often should I meet with my Supervisor?**

Students should maintain close contact with their Supervisor and keep all members of their Thesis Advisory Committee informed of the progress on their thesis. A Supervisor and a student might decide to set up a series of regularly scheduled appointments; this is particularly crucial during the final stages of preparation.

### **How often should I meet with my Committee?**

There is no rule; students should talk to their Supervisor about scheduling a full committee meeting. At the very least, students are required to keep the Supervisor and other members of the Thesis Advisory Committee informed of the progress of the work.

### **May I change my Supervisor?**

Only under extenuating circumstances, may the student or the Supervisor opt out of their supervisory arrangement prior to the completion of the student's program. In the unusual event that either the student or faculty member may need to have the supervisory arrangement changed, a meeting with the Associate Dean, Graduate Programs (or designate), should be arranged in the first instance by whomever (i.e. the student or faculty member) is requesting the change. Following that meeting, the Associate Dean will make further inquiries into the matter and/or determine whether the requested change is to be approved. The Associate Dean will ensure that both the student and Faculty member are notified of the decision within one month of the initial meeting.

Please familiarize yourself with the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' Graduate Supervision Handbook, for further information on the rights and responsibilities of students and Supervisors.

<https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/supervision.html>

Please inform the Associate Dean, Graduate Programs in a timely fashion of any serious difficulties such as major professional academic disagreements, interpersonal

conflicts, or potential conflict of interest situations.

### **What if I disagree with my Committee?**

Should there be a difference of opinion between the student and the committee concerning the readiness of the final draft for examination, the student has the right to appeal this decision. If the student is not successful in their appeal they do still have the right to proceed to defense. However, it must be recognized that if the committee believes the thesis is not ready the student will likely have a very difficult time defending the thesis before an examining committee. In the final analysis, the thesis is wholly the student's responsibility. The committee is there to offer advice and guidance.

### **Are other faculty members allowed to advise me?**

While working on their thesis, a student should feel free to consult any member of the Faculty of Education who may be able to offer advice. However, normally, students will consult with their Supervisor prior to consulting with others.

## **Proposal**

### **What is the purpose of a proposal?**

The proposal should leave the reader in no doubt as to what the student intends to accomplish in their thesis and how they will accomplish it. The proposal is a crucial piece of work which must be completed before time is invested in detailed research. A well-designed and tightly written proposal can save much time and effort in composing the final product. Students typically write and revise several drafts of a proposal before the final submission.

### **What are the components of a proposal?**

There is no set length for a proposal, but 20-25 pages (double-spaced) is usually sufficient.

A proposal must meet the following criteria:

- The issues are clearly defined
- Manageable limits for the study have been set

- The research questions or problem to be addressed are clearly stated
- The research techniques and methods of analyzing and/or interpreting the findings are described
- The applicability of the study to educational scholarship and/or practice is demonstrated
- Potential implications for education are noted
- Ethical issues are identified and discussed
- The adequacy of materials and available resources are demonstrated
- A preliminary bibliography is attached

## **Research Problem**

The research problem or question to be investigated is the core of the research. Until a workable research problem is clarified one cannot determine the nature of the approach or style of investigation that is appropriate for research.

The committee will advise the student on the merit of their idea and the quality of the language in which it is expressed. Most students find that narrowing down the focus of the research is not an easy task, but it is a critical first step in the design of the study.

## **Research Methods**

Once the research problem is clearly defined then one is ready to identify a research methodology and methods for the study.

Some questions to consider:

- Should the study be empirical-analytic? interpretive? critical?
- Are quantitative methods appropriate?
- What weight should be given to empirical and/or theoretical considerations?
- Will you utilize historical or philosophical methods of analysis?

## **When can I start my proposal?**

Following the successful completion of the qualifying examination (Ph.D. Qualifying Paper or Comprehensive Examination), a student may begin work on their proposal.

## **Proposal Presentation**

Within six months following successful completion of the qualifying papers or comprehensive examinations, a student must submit a written research proposal to their

Thesis Advisory Committee, and make an oral presentation to the committee in which the research problem, theoretical framework and methodology are explained and satisfactorily defended. The presentation will be open to all members of graduate faculty and to all graduate students.

To schedule a Proposal Presentation a student should work with their Supervisor to set a date and time then please inform the Graduate Programs Office for public announcement.

### **Proposal Approval**

When the Thesis Supervisory Committee is satisfied with a student's written proposal and the oral presentation made to the committee, the student may submit the proposal for approval. The student will submit one copy of their proposal electronically and the PhD Thesis Proposal Approval form (located at [https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/forms\\_guides.html](https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/forms_guides.html)) to the Graduate Programs Office for approval by Associate Dean, Graduate Programs (or designate). Please note that this form needs to be filled out, signed, and submitted electronically.

You will be notified by the Graduate Programs Office when your proposal has been approved.

If the proposed research involves human subjects, the student has to receive ethics approval from the Western University Research Ethics Board before the research begins. Please discuss this matter thoroughly with your Supervisor before you begin any aspect of your research.

Your proposal and ethics (if applicable) must be approved before you begin to collect your data. Any data collected before you receive approval cannot be used in your thesis.

### **Changes to research plan after the proposal has been accepted?**

Acceptance of the proposal does not mean that a student and their committee are committed to it in all circumstances. Unforeseen difficulties or unexpected findings might necessitate revisions or amendments to the original proposal. Students should consult their Supervisor and committee if they feel they need to make changes. If the changes involve any of the procedures approved by the Western University Research Ethics Board, the student will also have to notify Office of Research Ethics.



## Ethics Review

All research with human participants conducted by faculty, staff and students must be approved by a Western University Research Ethics Board before the research begins.

For example:

- Conducting interviews;
- Using surveys and questionnaires;
- Using written work produced in their own classrooms or those of colleagues

## Ethics Application

All applications for ethics approval for research with human participants must be submitted online through WesternREM (generally using the Non-Medical form) for consideration by the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB). The NMREB reviews all ethics applications involving human participants that include social, behavioral and cultural research in a non-clinical, non-patient-based population. As each new application is received by the NMREB, it will be assessed for level of risk and designated for delegated review (minimal risk) or for review by the Full Board. Any application that is set for delegated review will be reviewed by at least one member from the Faculty of Education.

The Office of Research Ethics has resources to help with WesternREM submissions. If you require assistance with WesternREM, please contact the WesternREM helpdesk at ext. 83059 or 519-661-3036 or email [wrem@uwo.ca](mailto:wrem@uwo.ca).

If you are a teacher, you must also secure the written permission of your Board. (Check your Board's procedures about this important point.)

## WesternREM

- <https://www.uwo.ca/research/ethics/human/WesternREM.html>

## Western's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board Guidelines

- [https://www.uwo.ca/research/docs/ethics/hsreb\\_guidelines/NMREB\\_Letter\\_of\\_Information\\_and\\_Consent\\_v13Sept2018.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/research/docs/ethics/hsreb_guidelines/NMREB_Letter_of_Information_and_Consent_v13Sept2018.pdf)

## Revisions to Approved Ethics Proposals

All revisions to ongoing studies must be sent to the Office of Research Ethics through WesternREM.

## Other School Boards/Locations

For research at a school board, you must obtain ethics approval from Western first. Once you have approval from Western's Office of Research Ethics please send the ethics approval, WREM form and attachments, and the necessary documents to the other location.

## Guidelines

2nd Edition of Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2): Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans: [https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique\\_tcps2-eptc2\\_2018.html](https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_tcps2-eptc2_2018.html)

## Thesis Preparation & Format

Thesis format specifications are listed in section 8.3 of the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' Graduate Regulations:

<https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/8.html>. Formatting templates can be located on the SGPS website at <https://grad.uwo.ca/academics/thesis/formatting.html>.

Overall, it is important to submit a thesis that has a consistent and readable appearance. Students must follow a standard style manual, so that the presentation of references/bibliographies is consistent throughout the thesis and conforms to a style appropriate to the discipline (i.e., referencing format of the American Psychological Association).

## Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations.

Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see [Scholastic Discipline for Graduate Students in the Western Academic Handbook](#)).

Plagiarism checking: Western University uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.

Students are required to follow Western University policies concerning plagiarism and

the extensive use of copyrighted material.

## Thesis Examination

The regulations of the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies concerning the thesis examination are on the web site and should be carefully consulted:

<https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/8.html>

### Forms

When the Advisory Committee decides that the thesis is ready for an examination, the student submits the following forms to the Graduate Programs Office:

- Doctoral Thesis Examination Request Form:  
[https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/forms\\_guides.html](https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/forms_guides.html)

The Doctoral Thesis Examination Request Form must be submitted to the Graduate Programs Office a minimum of seven weeks prior to the defense.

On the Application for Thesis Examination form the thesis Supervisor submits a list of examiners and a date for the examination. It is the Supervisor's responsibility to coordinate a date and time for the exam with the examiners.

The Graduate Programs Office submits to SGPS the proposed Doctoral Thesis Examination Board. The examination cannot be held until the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies has approved the list of examiners and the date.

### Scholarship@Western

A minimum of six weeks prior to the defense the student has to upload their thesis to Scholarship@Western: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/>, Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository, <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/>. Steps on how to submit a thesis are available on the SGPS' Preliminary Submission page at [https://grad.uwo.ca/academics/thesis/preliminary\\_submission.html](https://grad.uwo.ca/academics/thesis/preliminary_submission.html).

### Examination Committee

The Examination Committee consists of a neutral Chair, two program examiners from the Faculty of Education, a university Examiner, and an examiner external to the university. Please note that examiners from Affiliate University Colleges at Western

University cannot act as external examiners. The Supervisor provides a list of examiners. The School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies finds a chair for the examination. Examiners must be seen to be able to examine thesis and oral defense at arm's-length, free of substantial conflict of interest from any source. The tasks of the examiners are to:

- Determine if the thesis and the oral defense meet recognized scholarly standards for the degree
- Appraise the thesis for content - its underlying assumptions, methodology, findings, and scholarly significance of the findings
- Appraise the thesis for form - its organization, presentation of graphs, tables, and illustrative materials, and its use of accepted conventions for addressing the scholarly literature
- Evaluate the candidate's skill and knowledge in responding to questions and defending the thesis
- Ensure authenticity of authorship

### **Preliminary Examination of the Thesis**

After the thesis is uploaded to Scholarship@Western, examiners are contacted via email with instructions on how to access the thesis in the repository. Examiners receive an electronic version of the thesis and are also provided with instructions on how to request a paper copy. Paper copies generally arrive in one business day to examiners located at Western and are couriered to external examiners.

Examiners are required to perform a preliminary examination of the thesis. Preliminary evaluations from the examiners are due one week prior to the defense date. Each Examiner must independently and without consultation, decide whether the thesis meets the scholarly standards for the discipline and degree in form and content. There are two possible outcomes that the examiners may consider: Acceptable to go to defense with revisions/modifications, or Unacceptable to go forward to defense.

### **Public Lecture**

Students are required to present a public lecture on their thesis research. Normally the public lecture is scheduled the same day or within twenty-four hours before the thesis examination. The presentation should be approximately 30-45 minutes in length followed by a Q&A period from the audience. The Graduate Office at the Faculty of Education will announce the public lecture via email. The lecture is open to all members of the community. The examiners normally attend the public lecture and thesis examination.

## Examination

Please refer to section 8.4.4.2 of School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies' Graduate Regulations for regulations and procedures of the thesis oral examination - <https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/8.html>. Below is a summary of what happens during an exam.

The examination committee will examine the candidate on the content, format, and implications of the thesis. In addition to determining the adequacy of the findings, the committee must be satisfied that the work meets the proper standards of scholarship.

Before the oral examination begins, the Chair of the Examining Committee introduces the student to all members of the Committee. Then the student withdraws from the room for a few minutes while the Examiners determine the order of questioning and number of rounds of questioning (usually two).

Then the questioning begins. There are usually two rounds of questioning. On the completion of all questioning the student retires from the room while the examining committee makes its determination.

There are three possible outcomes to the oral defense that the Examiners may consider:

1. Pass - This indicates that the thesis is acceptable as it stands. Minor changes may be made before final submission.
  - a. Examples of such changes might include minor typographical, grammatical or formatting errors. Normally such changes should be completed within 1-2 weeks.
2. Pass conditional upon revisions to thesis - This indicates that required revisions must be reviewed and approved by a member of the examining committee prior to submission.
  - a. Examples of required revisions may include extensive typographical or grammatical errors; errors in calculation; the need for clarification or addition of content in order to meet requisite scholarly standards; some additions, deletions or editing of text; further analysis, or discussion of some data. Normally such revisions should be completed within 6 weeks after the examination.
3. Unacceptable - This indicates that the thesis cannot be accepted as it stands and would require extensive revision to reach the acceptable standard. A thesis found

unacceptable proceeds to the re-submission process.

- a. A thesis judged unacceptable may contain, for example, faulty conceptualization, inappropriate or faulty use of research methodology, misinterpretation or misuse of data, neglect of relevant material, illogical argument, unfounded conclusions, seriously flawed writing and presentation, and failure to engage the scholarly context.

The examination is closed to the public.

## Final Submission

Once the examination is successful, the student must complete any required changes within six weeks of the defense date or end of term; whichever comes first. In order to pass the defense, any required changes must be deemed as “minor”. The final thesis is resubmitted via Scholarship@Western Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. Students are also required to submit the following to the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies:

- original signed Certificate of Examination
- Library and Archives Canada Theses Non-Exclusive License form

Forms are available at

[https://grad.uwo.ca/academics/thesis/preliminary\\_submission.html](https://grad.uwo.ca/academics/thesis/preliminary_submission.html)

The Thesis and Membership Coordinator at SGPS will audit the final submission to ensure it meets all regulations pertaining to thesis formatting. Once approved the work will immediately be published within the repository and the student will be informed of the publication via email. Confirmations will also be sent to the supervisor and program administrator. Once the thesis is published, the student has officially completed the thesis requirement of their degree. Subject to approval by the University Senate, the student’s name is placed on the convocation list.

## Thesis Timelines

Term deadlines are listed on the Timetables and Timelines page of the Graduate Programs website at [https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/timetables\\_etc.html](https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/timetables_etc.html)

The following timelines need to be adhered to:

- Forms for oral examination must be submitted to the Graduate Programs Office at least **7 weeks** before defense date;

- Thesis must be uploaded to Scholarship@Western at least **6 weeks** before defense date;
- Deadline to upload final thesis for publication after defense is **6 weeks** or end of term; whichever comes first;
- Timeline specified by School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies:  
<https://grad.uwo.ca/academics/thesis/timelines.html>.

### **Thesis Defense Only Status**

This status is regulated by SGPS, it is important for students to familiarize themselves with this regulation: [https://grad.uwo.ca/academics/thesis\\_defense\\_only\\_tdo\\_status.html](https://grad.uwo.ca/academics/thesis_defense_only_tdo_status.html)

Graduate Programs Office  
Faculty of Education Western University  
1137 Western Road  
London, Ontario, Canada  
N6G 1G7

Tel: 519-661-2099  
Fax: 519-661-3029  
Email: [graded@uwo.ca](mailto:graded@uwo.ca)