

Master of Arts

Thesis Guide

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Introduction

The information provided below aims to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about the process of writing a thesis (or dissertation) for the Master of Arts in Education Studies and Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology program.

Students must familiarize themselves and adhere to the regulations set out of Section 8 of the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' Graduate Regulations:

<https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/8.html>. This section outlines the University-wide Thesis regulations and procedures including thesis preparation and formatting.

What are the benefits of pursuing the thesis?

- Writing a thesis provides you with a stimulating intellectual challenge.
- Writing a thesis offers you an opportunity to advance the state of knowledge in your chosen area.
- Writing a thesis provides an excellent foundation for doctoral studies and advanced research. Some doctoral programs require incoming students to have completed a thesis.

What is a Thesis?

A thesis 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 written in proper English.

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?

A student 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 Supervisory Committee?

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

Getting Started

Identify a topic or topics of interest and an issue you would like to explore.

What if I have no ideas?

An important part of the proposal writing process is turning questions and ideas into researchable questions:

- Review your course texts and assignments. What was most engaging?
- 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;

What are some advantages to deciding on a topic early in the program?

- You can choose courses that allow you to develop background knowledge to support your research.
- A Thesis Supervisor may recommend that certain additional graduate courses be

taken before work on the thesis begins. You may save yourself additional work if you identify the general nature of your planned research before you have completed all of your course work.

What are some advantages of waiting to make a decision about your thesis topic?

- You can develop a broad-based understanding of the field. This is especially important for Masters level students who intend to pursue Doctoral, Research Intensive degree;
- You can be open to new questions and new ways to configure your research.

How late in the program can I make the decision?

You should decide on a topic no later than the end of the semester in which you complete your last required course.

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 it will be accomplished. 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;
- Consistent writing style (the most current version of American Psychological Association style is preferred at the Faculty of Education).

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 your course work, a student may begin work on their proposal. The proposal should be submitted in the **Summer term of the first year**. Timing for part-time students is different – please consult the Graduate Office.

Proposal Approval and Submission

When the Thesis Supervisory Committee is satisfied with a student's written proposal, the student may submit the proposal for approval. The student will submit one copy of their proposal electronically and the Master's Thesis Proposal Approval form (located at https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/forms_guides.html) to the Graduate Programs Office for approval by the Associate Dean, Graduate Programs (or

designate). Please note that the Proposal Form must be signed 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. It is recommended that you apply for ethics while completing your proposal to prevent delays.

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 the 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. A student 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 WREM (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 WREM submissions. If you require assistance with WREM, please contact the helpdesk at 519-661-3036 or email wrem@uwo.ca. If you are conducting research at a school, you must also secure the written permission of the appropriate department (check the location'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

Revisions to Approved Ethics Proposals

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

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

Thesis Preparation and 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>.

There is no set limit to the length of an MA Thesis. The only reasonable criterion is the space that is needed to discuss the issue being explored but a typical MA Thesis is

approximately 80-125 pages in length. 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. Faculty of Education students are expected to follow the American Psychological Association guidelines.

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:

- Master's Thesis Examination Request Form: https://www.edu.uwo.ca/CSW/my-program/graduate-degrees/forms_guides.html. The form must be submitted to the Graduate Programs Office a minimum of four weeks prior to the defense.

On the Master's Thesis Examination Request 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 Master's Thesis Examination Request Form. 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 **three 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.

Examination Committee

The Examination Committee consists of a neutral Chair, two program examiners from the Faculty of Education, and a university Examiner. The Supervisor provides a list of examiners. The Graduate Office finds a Chair for the examination. Examiners must be seen to be able to examine the oral defense and the thesis 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 graph, 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.

Certificate of Examination

The student is expected to bring to the thesis defense one copy of the Certificate of Examination, to be signed by the examining committee. The Certificate of Examination is prepared by the student. Please refer to the examples in Section 8.3.1.6 of the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' Graduate Regulations:

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

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 of the thesis is closed to the public. 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.

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. The student is also required to submit the signed Certificate of Examination to the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

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

The following timelines need to be adhered to:

- The thesis proposal is due in the Summer term of the students first year;

- The Master's Thesis Examination Request Form must be submitted to the Graduate Programs Office at least **4 weeks** before defense date;
- Thesis must be uploaded to Scholarship@Western at least **3 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>.

Important term dates (start, end, add, drop, etc) 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.

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

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