

# **GUIDELINES FOR THESIS STUDENTS**

## **DIVISION OF LITERATURE AND LANGUAGES**

**AMERICAN STUDIES, CHINESE, CLASSICS, CREATIVE WRITING, ENGLISH,  
FRENCH, GENERAL LITERATURE, GERMAN, RUSSIAN AND SPANISH**

### **Thesis Overview**

For most majors in the Division of Literature and Languages the senior thesis is a detailed study on a topic drawn from any of the major fields embraced by the Division. Creative theses for English majors require approval from the Creative Thesis Committee and must include a critical introduction or afterword. The thesis in General Literature usually grows out of the cluster of four courses the student presents to the General Literature Committee when applying to be accepted for the major (no later than the end of the first semester of the junior year). All thesis proposals must be approved by the Division. All departments in the Division subscribe to one set of guidelines and due dates for theses, but students should also check with their departments for additional guidelines.

### **Thesis Topic and Committee**

Choosing a topic and adviser is the first major step of the thesis process. It is advisable to start thinking of possible topics as early as spring semester of junior year. While some of you will have a clear idea of what you would like to write on from the very beginning, most, in deciding on a topic, will benefit from conversations with peers and professors as well as a survey of theses written in your department in the past few years.

In many cases, you will be able to request an adviser, but the departments make the final decisions. In addition to your adviser, three other faculty members will read your final product; they comprise the oral examination board. Two of these board members come from the Division of Literature and Languages and are assigned to your thesis; these are your first and second readers. The fourth member of the board must be a teaching faculty member from outside the Division, and it is your responsibility to locate this person and request that they be your fourth reader (see below for more details). Working with the adviser is the most essential part of the thesis process, but it is highly advisable to consult with other members of the committee, especially the first reader, on the progress of your thesis.

### **Thesis Essentials**

The division distributes a list of thesis due dates at the beginning of each semester, (see [http://academic.reed.edu/lit\\_lang/thesis-dates.html](http://academic.reed.edu/lit_lang/thesis-dates.html)). The College and Division requirements are listed below; except where noted, the documents are to be submitted to the Division office, ETC 112B. Please note that your department and/or adviser may set additional deadlines that you must observe.

1. Preliminary topic and adviser (handled by departments); Thesis Information Form due to Division office.
2. Two-page statement of thesis topic.
3. Draft of one chapter, followed by thesis conferences with your adviser and first reader.
4. Complete thesis draft for review by adviser. (This draft, and this draft only, may be submitted electronically to your adviser, after obtaining your adviser's permission. Make sure that your adviser confirms receipt of the draft with the Division Administrative Assistant).

5. Complete thesis for your committee to the Registrar's Office (last day of classes), followed by thesis orals.
6. Library copies due to library.

Requirements for formatting your thesis are found in the College Senior Handbook, which is distributed by the Registrar's Office, (see [http://www.reed.edu/registrar/student\\_resources.html](http://www.reed.edu/registrar/student_resources.html)).

The length and organization of Literature and Languages theses vary, but the Division recommends a length of **18,000-22,000 words** (not including notes and bibliography), divided into chapters with an introduction and conclusion.

### **Suggestions for Research and Writing**

Prior to embarking on the thesis project, make sure to acquaint yourself with various research tools available through the library. Some departments will run a special library session for their seniors regarding research tools and opportunities. In addition to your adviser and department's advice, the Writing Center assists with writing problems; CUS provides thesis templates and offers computer and formatting help; your department librarian and library research guides will also be valuable resources.

### **Thesis Conferences (Mini-Orals), Turning in Your Thesis, Thesis Orals**

Late in the first semester of your thesis year, you will turn in a piece of writing of 5000-6000 words, indicative of a rough draft of a chapter. In the thesis conference you will be expected to describe your thesis topic, your research question to date, and your sense of how the thesis will develop in other chapters. After Thanksgiving, if you are a fall/spring thesis student, or in late April if you are a spring/fall thesis student, you, your thesis adviser, and your first reader will meet for an hour to discuss this initial piece of writing. This is the "mini-oral," and it is an important step in setting the agenda for the rest of your thesis. In the mini-oral you receive feedback on what you have written thus far which, in turn, may help you further refine your topic. The mini-oral marks the midpoint of your thesis year, but much writing remains to be done. From this point on, be diligent and meet your personal writing deadlines as well as those set by your thesis adviser. One month before the final draft is due, you must submit to the Divisional Administrative Assistant a complete draft of the thesis. Your adviser will read the draft and provide you with suggested revisions. By meeting this deadline you are assured of having enough time to revise and rewrite as necessary. The Division considers this an essential portion of the thesis course; thus, any student who does not meet the draft deadline should not expect to graduate at the regular time.

Though it is a good idea to begin thinking about prospective fourth readers early on, you will have to wait until after the orals schedules are distributed to enlist your fourth reader. At this time, faculty members will be able to commit to being on orals boards. It is entirely your responsibility to recruit your fourth reader. The earlier you enlist your fourth reader, the better; it is advisable to have several people in mind and to consult with your adviser if necessary. Remember that he/she must be a teaching faculty member from *outside* the Division of Literature and Languages.

You will turn in four copies of your thesis in final form to the Graduation Specialist in the Registrar's Office by 3pm on the last Friday of classes. "Final form" means that no changes may be made to the thesis after this time other than those required by your oral examination board, and that the thesis follows the required format guidelines (see the section "Thesis Format" in the senior handbook for details). Your thesis will be checked in the Registrar's Office for these items:

1. Your adviser's signature on a separate piece of paper indicating approval of your thesis
2. Correct format, all required sections, and page numbering
3. Presence of all four copies that will be distributed by you to the members of your orals board

Thesis Orals themselves take place the week before final exams. The oral can and should be an intellectually challenging experience; this is a chance to exchange views about your work, to clarify points, to discuss the potential for expanding the project. Typically, students are asked to relate their work to other literary, critical, and theoretical issues, to explain the development of the topic, to state what they would do if they had additional time, to reflect on what they might have done differently. You will be asked to state the thesis of your thesis.

### Final Submission

Thesis copies should *not* be bound or signed by your thesis adviser until after your oral exam. Two final, bound copies of your thesis with your thesis adviser's signature must be submitted to the library by the designated deadline. It is customary for students to give a bound copy of their thesis to their thesis adviser. Guidelines for the final copies can be found in the Reed College Senior Handbook, which is distributed by the Registrar's Office, (see [http://www.reed.edu/registrar/student\\_resources.html](http://www.reed.edu/registrar/student_resources.html)).

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### *Can I change topics? Can I change advisers?*

While the thesis changes and evolves throughout the year, a dramatic change in topic will inevitably set you back and drastically affect your ability to complete a respectable thesis. In rare circumstances your adviser may approve a change. It is very important to choose and refine your topic carefully early in the process and to discuss problems and concerns with your adviser.

Likewise, only in the most extenuating circumstances will a department approve switching advisers. Occasionally, due to faculty leaves, you may have one adviser for the first semester and another for the second, but unless the leave is an emergency one you will know well in advance.

You should remember that you may always consult other members of the faculty whose expertise may bear on your thesis. Your adviser may encourage you to do so.

#### *Can I get an extension?*

Do you really want to miss Renn Fayre? For a fee, you may take a weekend extension, but you must consult with your adviser and inform the Graduation Specialist in the Registrar's office by 3pm on the original due date. Readers must have at least 48 hours to read the thesis, so rescheduling of orals may be necessary. In extreme circumstances, and for a fee, a summer or winter break extension may be approved. Again, you must consult with your adviser and inform the Graduation Specialist in the Registrar's office by 3pm on the original due date. All summer/winter extension theses are due in the Registrar's Office on the first day of classes of the next semester by 3pm.

In cases of serious health problems or other emergencies, you may ask for an Incomplete (INC) on your thesis. To receive an Incomplete in your thesis, you will need to fill out a petition for waiver of policy form, obtain your thesis adviser's signature, your Division chair's signature, and have the petition approved by the Administration committee.

*What if I miss the deadline?*

If you miss the 3pm deadline you will be fined. Moreover, by diminishing their time to read your thesis, you run the risk of alienating your readers even before they have it in hand.

*How is thesis evaluated?*

The adviser determines the grade in consultation with the committee. Sometimes committee members will give you feedback in conversation after the oral; written feedback after the oral is usually limited to proofing for the final submission. Bear in mind that most faculty consider the process as well as the final product and oral when assigning a grade.

*Where can I find information online?*

Thesis Guidelines: [http://academic.reed.edu/lit\\_lang/thesis.html](http://academic.reed.edu/lit_lang/thesis.html)

Thesis Due Dates: [http://academic.reed.edu/lit\\_lang/thesis-dates.html](http://academic.reed.edu/lit_lang/thesis-dates.html)

College Senior Handbook: [http://www.reed.edu/registrar/student\\_resources.html](http://www.reed.edu/registrar/student_resources.html)

Computing and Information Services (CIS): <http://www.reed.edu/cis/help/index.html>

*Am I going to graduate? I got a letter from the Registrar saying I was missing a graduation requirement.*

**If you receive such a letter from the Registrar, it is your responsibility to meet with your academic adviser as soon as possible to discuss remedies.** Every year, able students with marvelous theses are unable to graduate. To avoid this misery, please check your transcripts on IRIS before your first semester of thesis, make sure you register appropriately, and consult further with your academic adviser and/or the Registrar if there are concerns. If you have done work outside Reed to fulfill requirements, have your official transcripts sent to the Registrar as early as possible and make sure that the expected credits show up on your record.

Laxness regarding PE requirements is frowned upon by the Division and the College. If you are short of PE requirements you will not graduate with the rest of your class.