



UTSA[®]

M.A. ENGLISH

THESIS & HANDBOOK

RHETORIC
LITERATURE

THEORY
WRITING



M.A. Thesis Option

The thesis option is designed for students seeking to specialize in a specific area of study by completing a substantial written project. Students approved for the Thesis Option must submit and orally defend their written thesis to the satisfaction of their thesis committee in order to earn their Master of Arts (M.A.) degree. The thesis defense constitutes the student's comprehensive exam.

There are three thesis tracks (areas of specialization) available for English MA students:

- **Rhetoric and Composition**
- **Creative Writing**
- **English Studies**

See the **M.A. graduate catalogue** for a summary of the requirements for each track.

Students are encouraged to apply for the Thesis Option before they begin their 19th credit hour of coursework. For full-time students who start the degree program in the fall term, this means applying before their second fall. The application/proposal should be submitted and approved the semester before the student plans to start taking thesis hours and thesis hours should be spread over two terms (see below).

If a student's application is denied, they may apply again. Once a student has completed their 21st credit hour of coursework, however, they are no longer eligible to apply for the thesis option and must complete the comprehensive exam in order to earn the MA degree.

1. Application/Proposal Approval Process

a. Recruit a Thesis Chair

Students who wish to pursue the thesis option are encouraged to discuss their scholarly and/or creative interests and goals with individual faculty as early as possible in their degree program. After completing 9 credit hours students may formally apply for a thesis track by submitting a thesis proposal. To initiate the application process, the student must find a graduate faculty member willing to sponsor their proposal and to serve as Thesis Committee Chair should it be approved. Only current graduate faculty in the English Department can serve as MA Committee Chair. For the Creative Writing and Rhetoric and Composition tracks, the thesis chair must be designated as a core faculty member in the chosen area. In addition to advising the student in their efforts to formulate a thesis proposal, the chair will (with input from the student) form a thesis committee.

b. Submit a Thesis Proposal

Students should write their thesis proposal in consultation with their chair and should expect to submit more than one draft of the proposal prior to the final deadline. All thesis proposals must include:

- The Thesis Proposal cover sheet, appropriate to the selected track.
- An 800–1000-word proposal that identifies the scope and goals of the thesis project and the critical contexts and/or scholarly/literary tradition to which it belongs.
- An indicative schedule of production for the thesis project with specific deadlines for completion.

Each thesis track has its own cover sheet (see Appendix A) and these cover sheets can specify proposal deadlines and also requirements/expectations for proposals in those areas.

c. Application/Proposal Approval Process

Once the proposal has been accepted by the Chair, the proposal should be circulated to the committee for review. The Chair may call for a full committee thesis proposal meeting at this time. Once the proposal has been accepted and signed by the entire committee, the student will sign the form indicating their commitment to moving forward on the thesis track with the committee assembled.

The Committee Chair will forward the proposal (including the signed cover sheet) to the MA GAR *no later than the 10th Friday of the Semester (Late March/Late October for Fall/Spring) before the student begins taking thesis hours*. The GAR will ensure that the materials submitted and the committee conform to department, college and graduate school requirements. If any revisions are required, the GAR will inform the thesis chair, who will then work with the student to institute necessary changes. Once the GAR signs the approval form, the proposal and signature form will then be forwarded for approvals. A copy of the thesis proposal and approval form is then placed in the student's file.

2. Committee Makeup and Functions

The M.A. thesis committee undertakes responsibility for approving the student's proposal, for providing general supervision of the student's project, and ultimately for certifying to the Graduate School that an acceptable M.A. Thesis has been written and defended. Each committee should consist of at least three members, and should include:

- **Thesis Chair:** The chair organizes the committee, schedules meetings (including the defense), adjudicates any differences among committee members, and communicates with the M.A. GAR. The thesis chair also has general responsibility for monitoring the student's progress. Student thesis hours are usually overseen by the thesis chair.
- **Alternate Chair:** The alternate chair agrees to undertake the chair's responsibilities should the chair be unable to perform their duties as planned. The alternate chair should usually be an English Department graduate faculty member.

After the proposal is approved, it is recommended that students meet regularly with their thesis chair (at least once a month) and also with each member of the thesis committee (at least twice

a semester) to seek advice/input. All committee members are expected to be available for consultation.

UTSA faculty from other departments may serve on English MA thesis committees so long as they are designated “graduate faculty” in their respective departments. With approval of the MA GAR and GPC, UTSA faculty from outside the English Department may serve in the role of alternate chair with the understanding that they will be expected to chair the committee if the assigned chair can’t fulfil their obligation. However, at least one committee member must be a member of the English Department’s graduate faculty at the time of the defense.

Potential committee members not designated as UTSA graduate faculty, including department retirees, must be admitted as Special Members to the Graduate Faculty, which requires majority vote approval by the M.A. GPC and the English Graduate Faculty as well as the Department Chair, the COLFA Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, the Graduate School Dean, and the UTSA Graduate Council. This process is time consuming, so if a thesis chair determines such a member is necessary/preferred (i.e., to cover an area not represented or readily covered by UTSA faculty), they should submit a request in writing to the M.A. GAR as early in the process as possible so the necessary approvals can be requested. They should also have an alternate member lined up in case the request is denied.

If for some reason a committee member cannot continue service in their assigned role, the committee chair will be tasked with finding/proposing a replacement. Students are usually consulted in such cases, but their preferences cannot always be accommodated. If for some reason the committee chair cannot continue service on the committee, then the alternate chair will take that role and will locate a third faculty member to fill out the committee. Changes in committee makeup should be completed well in advance of the final thesis defense wherever possible.

In cases of extreme emergency, where a defense is scheduled but a committee member is unexpectedly unable to attend, the MA GAR and or the Department Chair may fill in for the missing committee member or assign an English Department faculty member to do so. Every effort should be made to find a faculty member with expertise relevant to the thesis, and if the student is on the Rhetoric and Composition Track or the Creative Writing Track, a core faculty member in that area should be asked to fill in for the missing committee member before recruiting other faculty.

3. Written Thesis [Thesis Hours]

Students must demonstrate their ability to complete and defend an original thesis, one appropriate to their particular thesis track, whether in creative writing, rhetoric and composition, or an area of English studies. The thesis should include a substantial piece of original writing that adheres to professional guidelines for publication/distribution in the area of specialization.

Upon approval of their thesis proposal/application by the MA GAR, students must enroll in Thesis Hours [either English 6983 and English 6986]. Students are expected to register for the

thesis for a period of at least two consecutive semesters, and so should not plan to take both thesis hour courses in the same term. That said, thesis hours can be repeated more than once, and students are required to sign up for thesis hours during each semester they receive advice and/or assistance for their thesis committee members or otherwise use University resources in the service of writing thesis.

f. Portfolio Option

In consultation with their thesis chair, the student may propose their writing be situated in a broader portfolio. Thesis portfolios are usually designed to follow professional practice by preparing a suite of work often required for consideration as a higher education teaching professional, and they can often mimic materials and processes required for application into PhD programs.

Portfolio materials may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A curriculum vitae
- A cover letter or critical preface
- A written MA thesis
- A teaching philosophy
- Teaching materials such as syllabi, assignment sheets, and lesson plans
- Additional writing samples

Every thesis proposal should specify the precise expectations for the student's project.

4. Timeline/Deadlines for Thesis Submission and Defense

- Commit to submit thesis and defend by 4th Friday of the Semester
- Schedule defense by 6th Friday of the Semester
- Deliver Final Draft of Thesis at least 2 weeks before scheduled defense [unless a later deadline is unanimously agreed to in writing by all committee members]
- Complete Oral Defense by 12th Friday of the Semester

In consultation with their chair, the student will decide when to schedule their thesis defense.

Failure to successfully defend the thesis by the date scheduled will constitute a failed attempt (unless the thesis committee chair, the GPC, the Department Chair, and the Associate Dean approve an exception due to extenuating circumstances).

5. Oral Thesis Defense

The thesis must be successfully defended, and all paperwork filed with the GAR at least three weeks before the last day of the semester in which the student intends to graduate.

The thesis defense entails two components: 1) an oral presentation by the candidate before the thesis committee of the methods and conclusions of the thesis (normally less than one hour in

length), and 2) a discussion of the thesis during which the candidate answers questions formulated by the thesis committee.

By majority vote, the committee can opt to either pass or fail the thesis and defense. A vote to pass should indicate that the faculty member is satisfied that the student has:

- 1) Completed the work assigned by the student's thesis committee.
- 2) Completed a thesis that is an independent investigation in the student's major field.
- 3) Adequately presented and defended (addressed questions/concerns) regarding the thesis.
- 4) Submitted an abstract for publication in thesis abstracts international approved by the thesis committee.

By unanimous vote, the committee may decide to:

- 1) Pass the thesis provisionally, in which case specific revisions must be completed by a specific date before the committee signs the approval form. Note, this does not change the deadline for completion specified above. Final approvals must be submitted at least 3 weeks before the end of term.
- 2) Recommend a "high pass." This designation should be reserved only for thesis and defenses that far exceed expectations.

Upon the successful completion of the defense and any revisions, the thesis committee will approve the thesis and certify that the student has met all requirements for the thesis as specified in M.A. degree program. It is the responsibility of the M.A. thesis chair to submit the Certification of Completion of Thesis Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree to the English Graduate Office, which will then be forwarded through the M.A. GAR, the Department Chair, the Dean of the College, and the Dean of the Graduate School to certify that the candidate has met all requirements for the M.A. degree.

6. Maximum Attempts/Maximum Time in Degree

All MA students are given two attempts to submit their written thesis and complete their oral defense. If a student does not pass the first time, another defense will be scheduled for the following semester.

Thesis track students have a maximum of 3 years after the thesis proposal is approved by MA GPC to successfully defend their thesis. If a student has not successfully submitted and defended their thesis by that time, they will be ineligible for the degree.

Per university policy, graduate students have six years from their term of original registration as a degree seeking student to complete a graduate degree program under the catalog in effect at the time of initial registration at UTSA, provided they are continuously enrolled at UTSA.