

Special Guidelines for Developing and Defending a Creative Writing Honors Thesis

Prospectus

The prospectus is the document that establishes your intentions for your thesis and makes a strong case for why your project should constitute an Honors thesis. A strong thesis usually follows from a well-developed prospectus. Care and attention at the stage of the prospectus can help you save time and energy later on. The idea for the thesis sometimes grows out of work you do in one of your creative writing classes. If so, the prospectus should show how the thesis will build significantly on the work of a course or project with a faculty member and not merely lengthen it. Furthermore, a creative thesis must be situated within a scholarly framework that meets the expectations of the Honors designation.

The prospectus for the creative thesis should contain the following elements:

1. **Purpose:** a statement of your purpose in completing the project. This should be fairly precise. For every writing project there are decisions about *content*, *genre*, and *formal organization*. Each of these issues would merit review as you set out the purpose of your creative thesis. You may want to address the following suggested questions.

Content: what is your subject matter? What is the significance of that subject matter within our culture? To which culture, specifically, are you directing your work? What issues do you hope to address?

Genre: in what genre will you be working? Why is this genre appropriate for your subject matter?

Formal organization: what specific formal strategies will you be employing, and why are these strategies useful for this specific content and genre?

Or you may decide to give one of these three components special, extended attention. If you are planning a selection of poems, for instance, your purpose might be to explore the limits of a particular form. If you are planning a collection of short stories, your purpose might be to experiment with two or three narrative devices. In other words, simply stating that your purpose in writing the thesis is to further develop your writing abilities would be insufficient.

2. **Background and Significance:** an explanation of the context and issues central to your project. This might include a brief discussion of the genre with which you are dealing (sonnet, science fiction, etc), a technique you hope to employ in a new or significant way (minimalist narrative, multiple points of view, etc.), or a theory (aesthetic, narrative, poetic, etc.). You will cite and engage with the work of respected scholars and/or writers to develop the explanation of background and significance.
3. **Methods and Procedures:** a brief description of the procedures you will use to conduct whatever research is necessary to write your project. In addition to the research required

to develop a thorough understanding of the context and issues central to your project, this includes any research required for the development of the content of your creative project. For instance, if you are writing a chapter for a novel about cowboys in the late 1800s, and you are focusing on the use of dialogue in the American Western, you may need to do additional research on dialects specific to a particular region and time, the business of ranching and herding, etc.

If the *content* of the creative segment does not require additional research, the bulk of the scholarly component may focus on pertinent issues of genre, technique, and/or theory as noted above, to be used in the introduction. So, to return to the example of a chapter for a novel about cowboys, if you already have a great deal of knowledge about regional dialects, the business of ranching, etc., then most of your research would go towards a discussion of the history of the genre (the American Western), common techniques used for handling dialogue by notable writers of the genre, useful observations by scholars of the genre, and your own preferences in this regard. In short, you are to demonstrate a keen sense of how your creative work fits within related literary categories.

4. **Preliminary Outline:** a detailed outline anticipating the final structure. This is an outline of the final thesis as a whole, not merely the creative portion. Typically, an outline for a creative thesis would include an introduction, the creative text, a conclusion, and a bibliography. Your outline should include specific topics to be addressed in each section. Please note that the preliminary outline is meant to *aid* in the development of your thesis. Outlining the creative segment may be more difficult than outlining the scholarly components. Departures from the original outline of the creative segment are, in this regard, a normal part of the writing process.
5. **Preliminary Bibliography:** a listing of sources already found to be relevant to the project in correct MLA format. Typically, these are the works by writers and scholars mentioned in items 2 and 3 above.
6. **Qualifications of the Investigator:** a statement of your qualification to complete a creative thesis. What creative writing instruction and experience have you had? Have you won any creative writing awards? What have you published and in what venues?
7. **Qualifications of the Advisor:** a statement explaining how the advisor is qualified to direct you in this particular project. Does the advisor teach courses in creative writing? What creative works has the advisor published and in what venue? Have you worked with the advisor in the past? If you are writing poetry, fiction, or nonfiction as an English major, you must choose as your advisor a member of the creative writing faculty in the English Department. Other advisor credentials may be appropriate if you are writing in a genre associated with theater or cinema, or if your creative thesis will be in a language other than English.
8. **Time line:** a detailed schedule for completion of the various aspects of the project. Estimate when you will start and complete the introduction, the creative text, the conclusion and the bibliography. Noting target dates for meeting with your advisor for

discussion of each is also useful. The time line demonstrates that your project can be completed and defended by the deadlines required for timely graduation.

9. **Budget:** a list of anticipated expenses.

Thesis

The creative Honors thesis is a significant creative writing project produced at the undergraduate level and of particularly fine quality and sophistication. In other words, it is less substantial than a graduate thesis, but more so than a final project in an undergraduate course. Your thesis should be the most developed creative effort of your undergraduate years.

Although the creative writing segment will constitute the bulk of your thesis, it should be framed in the same scholarly terms set up in your prospectus. The following format is generally the most useful, though you and your advisor may choose to make appropriate alterations. However, discarding the critical and evaluative components of your thesis is not an option.

Your **Introduction** will include an expanded discussion of items 1-3 from the prospectus. You should be able to articulate a key question or issue that usefully frames your creative work. What is the issue, what are key positions taken by respected professionals in the field (in practice or theory), what is your position on the issue, and how does your creative work illustrate, complicate, or reflect upon that position? Ideally, this would be done *before* you complete substantial work on the creative segment so that you benefit from the added perspective developed in the introduction.

The **Creative Text** should have a title, be formatted consistently, and be carefully proofed and edited.

The **Conclusion** should briefly review the genesis of your project and include one of the following: (1) a final analysis of what you learned, as a result of developing the creative work, with respect to the particular focus outlined in your introduction, or (2) further insights that emerged as a result of thinking about your creative work in relation to larger issues. In either case, you should also detail what further work you might do to make your piece ready eventually for local, regional, or national publication. (Publication is not required for a successful thesis and defense.)

The **Bibliography** is a complete list of the sources used in the development of the final, complete version of your thesis.

Please see *Writing and Defending the Honors Thesis* (on the Honors Program website) for further information regarding research, drafting, submitting a final draft, submission deadlines, thesis defense and sample questions, etc.