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# WRITING AND DEFENDING THE HONORS THESIS

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## Research Phase

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Upon the approval of your thesis proposal, you will be prepared to advance into the bulk of your research work. Normally, you will do the research or the preparation for your project the semester *before* you write the thesis. Work closely with your advisor throughout the research phase to be sure you are gathering the right data or information. Keep a careful log of your research efforts and take notes about information that will likely become a part of the final document.

## Drafting the Thesis

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Writing the first draft of your thesis can be the most challenging aspect of the whole research process as you try to pull all of your work and experiences together to make something meaningful. Your prior preparation and organization will pay off here. Show your draft in stages to your advisor as you complete each part. Keep in mind that your advisor may require numerous intermediate drafts in order to help you improve your paper. *The advisor, and in some cases possibly the reader, should see a complete first draft about two months before you plan to have your defense.* Students often do poorly in defenses when they write and submit only one draft of their thesis, and then hold their defense a few days later. Plan to take time for many revisions.

## Submitting a Final Draft

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When you and your advisor are satisfied with the thesis, you are ready to submit your final draft. This final draft will be read by your faculty advisor, faculty reader, and your Department Honors coordinator prior to your thesis defense. The final draft must conform to the Honors Program specifications for the final copy that will eventually be bound and submitted to the library, although this final draft may be printed on regular paper. Please follow the formatting requirements contained in the **Thesis Formatting Guidelines** packet. At least two weeks before your defense, you need to give copies of your final draft to your faculty advisor, faculty reader, Department Honors coordinator, and to the Honors Advisement Center. The **Thesis Submission Form** should be filled out and be sure to take it with you to your Thesis Defense.

## Submission Deadlines

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Your final thesis and portfolio must be submitted to the Honors Advisement Center (350 MSRB) at the beginning of the term you plan to graduate. We will accept your graduation materials no later than 5 pm on your due date. Please check our website, <http://honors.byu.edu/>, regularly for the correct deadlines. Some students choose to push their graduation date back one semester to give themselves extra time for the completion of their thesis and/or portfolio. To do this, you must officially change your graduation date with your college advisement center and contact the Honors Advisement Center to let them know as well.

## The Honors Thesis Defense

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You must coordinate with your faculty advisor, faculty reader, and your Department Honors coordinator to find a time and place for the thesis defense. Contact your department secretary or the Honors Advisement Center for help in scheduling a room on campus. Once you scheduled your Thesis Defense, you will need to fill out the "Defense Information Form" and submit it to the Honors Advisement Center by the deadline and let your Thesis Defense committee know where and when your defense will be. You also need to make sure that your faculty reader and your Department Honors coordinator has a copy of your Thesis draft and your faculty advisor has a copy of your Thesis draft plus your portfolio at least a week prior to your Thesis defense. You can invite your department chair and family members to your defense as long as the faculty advisor is okay with it.

The defense will usually last at least one hour. It will consist of a review of your portfolio and series of questions designed to test the quality of your research and writing as well as the limits of your thesis and portfolio. After the defense, the Thesis committee will complete the Thesis Submission Form and will submit it to the Honors Advisement Center by the deadline. The committee may make one of three judgments:

- **Pass:** The thesis and portfolio are complete and meet the full expectations of the examiners.

- **Pass with Qualifications:** Minor revisions are required before the thesis and/or portfolio can be accepted.
- **Recess:** Major revisions of the thesis or portfolio, and a new defense, are required.

The defense will most often focus on the content of the thesis, but it may also devote time to questions about relevant course work, research and research methods, the bibliography and your portfolio (Great Works experiences, etc.). You can see from the judgments listed that no one ever categorically “fails” a defense. If any corrections are required, the thesis and portfolio can be resubmitted to the Honors Advisement Center once they are fixed.

### **Sample Questions at the Thesis Defense**

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- How did you come to your thesis topic?
- How did you choose your advisor among other qualified candidates?
- How is your topic significant to your discipline, and what are its connections to larger areas of inquiry and scholarship?
- What are your central conclusions or results? Are those conclusions consistent with previous work in your discipline?
- What contribution to scholarship does your thesis make?
- What further work does your study suggest?
- What was the most difficult part of doing your thesis?
- How do you compare your thesis experience to the other research and writing you have done?

For a comprehensive discussion of portfolio requirements and additional possible defense questions, please refer to the **Portfolio Requirements** handout.

### **After a Successful Defense**

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Make any necessary corrections to your thesis and then prepare to have it printed and bound through the BYU Print and Mail Services. Once the Honors Advisement Center received your Thesis Submission Form, they will send you an email with instructions on how to upload and order four copies of your thesis. It is important to follow the instructions found in the email. The four copies will go to the library, your department, your faculty advisor, and you. For these four copies, the Honors program subsidizes the cost of binding and you are responsible for the cost of printing. Also, make sure to check your margins and that all titles are correctly punctuated and capitalized. Also turn in a pdf file of the final copy by emailing it to [honors@byu.edu](mailto:honors@byu.edu) by 5pm on the date due:

After the copies are bound, you will receive your copy through the mail and the others will be mailed accordingly. If you would like to order additional copies, you may do so at the same time you order the required copies.