

SCHOOL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

MA in Human Rights and Social Justice

Graduate Handbook
2026–2027

Carleton University

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Every effort has been made to ensure the information here is accurate, including links.*

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About this handbook

This handbook is a practical guide and resource for students in the MA in Human Rights and Social Justice (HRSJ). It brings together, in one place, the information new graduate students most often need: campus and program resources, funding, the three degree pathways, supervision, proposal writing, research ethics, and the steps that carry you from admission to completion.

It is a guide, not a rulebook. Always confirm official dates, deadlines, and regulations in the current Graduate Calendar, which is the authoritative source. If anything here ever conflicts with the Graduate Calendar or another University policy, the official source governs.

Who can help

You are never navigating this alone. Two people are especially important:

The Graduate Advisor is a faculty member in the School who serves a three-year term in this administrative role. The Advisor is responsible for information and decisions related to the academic side of your studies — pathway decisions, program approvals, academic progress, and exceptions that need program support. From 1 July 2026, the Graduate Advisor is Shazia Sadaf (shaziasadaf@cunet.carleton.ca).

The Graduate Administrator handles the technical and procedural side — registration, application submissions, forms, extension requests, thesis-defence logistics, and graduation. The current School contact address is iisgrad@carleton.ca.

Your supervisor (or co-supervisors) guides the intellectual work: developing your project, planning the research, giving feedback on drafts, preparing your ethics application, and seeing you through the MRE or thesis.

Finally, the School Director and all faculty in the School are glad to answer questions and point you in the right direction. Do not hesitate to reach out.

How this handbook is organized. Part I gathers the institutional support around you — University, School, and student resources, including websites, funding, and workplace information for teaching and research assistants. Part II explains the academic program: the three pathways, the roles of supervisors and students, proposal writing, research ethics, and the deadlines that shape your path to completion.

Part I: University and program resources

Essential official websites

A few official sites are worth bookmarking on day one. They hold the rules, dates, and forms that everything else depends on.

- **Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs (FGPA)** — forms, funding, thesis requirements, professional development, and student supports. (<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/>)
- **Graduate Calendar** — the authoritative source for graduate courses, programs, and the Graduate General Regulations. If you have a question about University policy, look here first. (<https://calendar.carleton.ca/grad/>)
- **HRSJ program requirements (Graduate Calendar)** — the official credit requirements for each pathway. (<https://calendar.carleton.ca/grad/gradprograms/humanrightsandsocialjustice/>)
- **Academic Year and important dates** — Senate-approved dates, including thesis submission deadlines. (<https://calendar.carleton.ca/academicyear/>)
- **School resources and forms** — HRSJ forms, this handbook, and links for current students. (<https://carleton.ca/iis/resources-and-forms/>)

Tip: take time early on to familiarize yourself with the Graduate General Regulations. Knowing where the rules live saves a great deal of stress later.

Library and research support

MacOdrum Library services for graduate students (<https://library.carleton.ca/services/services-graduate-students>). The Library offers research consultations, databases, borrowing, workshops, and citation support. Use the Library's subject-specialist directory to find the current liaison librarian for Human Rights and Social Justice.

Carleton students have access to a wide range of resources, including: unlimited interlibrary loans through the RACER program; immediate article access and downloading through many databases; off-campus access to the catalogue and online journals; borrowing privileges at the University of Ottawa; laptop loans and wireless throughout the Library; and pay printers and photocopiers. It is also worth familiarizing yourself with the resources available through Library and Archives Canada.

Student services and representation

- **Graduate Students' Association (GSA)** — your main source of representation, advocacy, and support services on campus. The GSA works to maintain a barrier-free academic and social environment, acts as a line of communication with the administration, and supports members' professional development and financial and emotional wellbeing. (<https://gsacarleton.ca/>)
- **Global Opportunities and International Student Services Office (GO-ISSO)** — immigration advising, UHIP, international-student support, and exchange and study-abroad opportunities. The office is currently on the 4th floor of MacOdrum Library. (<https://carleton.ca/go-isso/>)

- **Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC)** — academic accommodations, advocacy, and disability-related supports. (<https://carleton.ca/pmc/>)
- **Counselling and wellness services** — health, counselling, crisis, and wellbeing resources for graduate students. (<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/counselling-and-wellness-services/>)

Teaching and research assistantships (CUPE 4600)

Carleton is a unionized workplace. **CUPE 4600** (<https://cupe4600.ca/>) represents teaching assistants (TAs), internally funded research assistants (RAs), and contract instructors (CIs) — all roles critical to how the University runs. It is your responsibility to read your collective agreement and to know the key articles on workload, salaries, and grievances.

Do not expect the professor connected to your teaching assignment (or internally funded RAship) to know the details of your collective agreement. For a TAsip, you will be asked to accept a Statement of Duties, prepared with the professor, that outlines the tasks and time commitment for the course. This is not a contract. The only legally binding contract you have as a teaching assistant is your collective agreement.

Track your hours, and speak up early

Keep your own record of the hours you work. If you find you cannot mark or prepare in the time you agreed to when you accepted the Statement of Duties, raise it with the faculty member as soon as possible — and seek advice from CUPE 4600 where appropriate. 'Overwork' situations are serious and grievable. Faculty members genuinely appreciate open, honest communication well before a problem develops, and early notice usually creates more options for everyone.

See also: Carleton's teaching-assistant resources (<https://carleton.ca/deputyprovost/faculty-affairs/teaching-assistants/>).

Become a union steward

HRSJ graduate students may serve as CUPE 4600 departmental stewards. Stewards attend the Stewards' Council on behalf of HRSJ, share workplace information, and bring departmental concerns to the union. Consider running. Nominations for departmental stewards are typically open from early September to mid-October — confirm current dates on the union website (<https://cupe4600.ca/become-a-union-steward/>).

Awards, scholarships, and emergency support

Verify before you rely on it

Funding programs, eligibility rules, amounts, and deadlines change from year to year. Always review your offer of admission and the current terms and conditions of funding, and confirm details before you count on an award or advance.

There are several avenues for funding. The list below is a starting point, not the full universe of what is available.

Internal awards

Donor-funded awards and other University competitions are administered through Carleton (<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/awards-and-funding/internal-awards/>). Some require an application through Carleton Central; others use departmental nomination. The application process is usually not

onerous, so it is worth researching these. Note: students holding a Naida Waite Award are not eligible to apply for donor-funded awards.

External scholarships

The two major external competitions are the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS), at the provincial level, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) master's scholarship, at the federal level — but these are not the only external funding available. At the federal level, the master's award is the Canada Graduate Scholarships – Master's (CGS-M), administered jointly by the three granting agencies (SSHRC, CIHR, and NSERC); for Human Rights and Social Justice, SSHRC is the relevant agency. Both domestic and international students may apply for OGS; only domestic students may apply for SSHRC. Eligibility differs by competition, so read the current rules carefully.

- **SSHRC information** — (<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/sshrc/>)
- **Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS)** — (<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/ogs/>)
- **Terms and conditions of graduate funding** — (<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/newgrad-students/terms/>)

GSA and CUPE 4600 support

Your GSA and your union are also sources of financial support. Current programs may include:

- **GSA travel grants** for students presenting at conferences, and family-leave grants for students with family responsibilities. See the GSA emergency grant page and the GSA site for current programs.
- **CUPE 4600 TA Advance** — open to graduate TAs with a regular position (130 hours per term), for up to \$750 in advance.
- **CUPE 4600 Emergency Fund** — for Local 4600 members who have faced an unexpected hardship in the last three months resulting in a financial emergency. See CUPE 4600 Unit 1 for current details.

HRSJ program bursary

The School may offer needs-based financial assistance of up to \$2,000 over the course of your program. Contact the Graduate Administrator for the current form, criteria, deadline, and available amount.

Start here: FGPA awards and funding and the School resources and forms page.

Professional, writing, and teaching development

FGPA and other Carleton units offer professional-development opportunities geared to both academic skill-building and employability beyond the academy. Offerings change from year to year, so consult the current listings rather than a fixed list.

- **Graduate professional development** — (<https://carleton.ca/gradpd/>)
- **Graduate writing support** — workshops and one-on-one support, plus self-paced professional-writing modules. (<https://carleton.ca/gradpd/writing-support/>)
- **Teaching-assistant training and support** — (<https://carleton.ca/deputyprovost/faculty-affairs/teaching-assistants/>)

- **MyGradSkills.ca** — self-paced online modules on teaching and learning, career development, community engagement, entrepreneurship, and more. (<https://www.mygradskills.ca/>)

Enrichment Mini-Course Program (EMCP) (<http://carleton.ca/emcp/>) — each year Carleton offers a week-long series of mini-courses for students in grades 8–11 (Ontario) and Secondary 2–5 (Québec), which can be a rewarding teaching opportunity.

Office space, mail, and keys

Graduate students in the School normally have access to a desk or cubicle in the shared Grad Lounge on the 13th floor of Dunton Tower, which also serves as a lounge area. You may use the seminar room down the hall when it is not booked for a class, defence, talk, or other event. Keys to the shared space are assigned by the Graduate Administrator — make an appointment to receive yours, and check current arrangements for workspace and mail.

Academic progress and registration

Check before you change your pathway

Your degree pathway, thesis weight, registration, and any change of status are governed by the Graduate Calendar and require approval. Do not change your registration on the basis of this handbook alone — consult the Graduate Advisor and Graduate Administrator first.

- **Academic standing:** a grade of B- or better is normally required in each course credited toward the master's degree. The Graduate Calendar explains the limited circumstances in which a C+ may be permitted.
- **Continuous registration:** once you register in a thesis or research-essay course, you must normally remain registered in it every successive term until you complete, including the term of examination or final assessment.
- **Time to completion:** full-time master's students normally have six terms from initial registration; part-time students normally have eighteen terms, unless the program specifies otherwise.
- **Leaves, exemptions, and extensions:** these require formal approval. Discuss your circumstances with the program before the relevant registration or completion deadline.
- **International students:** registration choices and leaves can affect your immigration status and work authorization. Get advice from GO-ISSO before changing your registration.

Academic integrity, copyright, and responsible AI use

All coursework, proposals, MREs, and theses must comply with Carleton's Academic Integrity Policy. You are also responsible for copyright, permissions, confidentiality, privacy, and accurate attribution.

Talk with your instructor or supervisor before using generative AI or other automated tools in your research or writing. Document any permitted uses, and follow the rules that apply to the specific course, research project, funding source, and publication venue — expectations can differ, and what is acceptable in one context may not be in another.

See: Academic integrity, thesis requirements, and AI considerations for graduate research.

Part II: Degree pathways and research completion

Official pathway requirements

There are three ways to complete the MA in Human Rights and Social Justice. Each pathway totals 4.0 credits, and all three include the two core seminars, HRSJ 5901 and HRSJ 5902. If you are specializing in African Studies, you must also complete the requirements attached to that specialization as set out in the Graduate Calendar.

Pathway	Required courses and research component	Total
Coursework	HRSJ 5901 (0.5); HRSJ 5902 (0.5); 3.0 credits in 5000-level HRSJ courses or approved graduate courses from outside the program	4.0
Research essay (MRE)	HRSJ 5901 (0.5); HRSJ 5902 (0.5); 2.0 credits in approved graduate courses; HRSJ 5908 Research Essay (1.0)	4.0
Thesis	HRSJ 5901 (0.5); HRSJ 5902 (0.5); 1.0 credit in approved graduate courses; HRSJ 5909 Thesis (2.0)	4.0

For every pathway, no more than 1.0 credit in Directed Studies may count toward the degree. The Graduate Calendar governs whether a course from outside HRSJ can count toward the program. Obtain approval from the Graduate Advisor before you register. Core seminar titles: HRSJ 5901, *Critical Approaches to Human Rights and Social Justice*; HRSJ 5902, *Critical Methodologies in Human Rights and Social Justice*.

Choosing or changing a pathway

Choose the pathway that best fits your academic goals, your research readiness, your timeline, and the kind of work you want to do. Beginning this year, students are asked to choose their pathway at the start of the program rather than deciding later, because funding, timelines for completion, and tuition structure now differ between the thesis and non-thesis streams. Discuss your options with the Graduate Advisor as early as possible so that your registration, funding, and completion plan are aligned from the outset. If your plans change, a switch between streams may still be possible with the approval of the Graduate Advisor and Graduate Administrator, but you should understand the course-load implications of switching and weigh the funding and tuition implications before requesting one.

Because pathway choice affects your registration and degree requirements, consult the Graduate Advisor and Graduate Administrator before selecting or changing a pathway; a change may require formal approval by the program and by FGPA. Students seeking the MRE or thesis pathway must apply to the HRSJ Graduate Committee by the internal deadline communicated each year — normally in May, as part of your proposal submission. Approval is not automatic. Submit materials electronically to the Graduate Administrator and the Graduate Advisor with a clear subject line such as “Thesis or Research Essay Application.”

At a glance: MRE vs. thesis

Feature	Research essay (MRE)	Thesis
Research-course weight	1.0 credit (HRSJ 5908)	2.0 credits (HRSJ 5909)
Typical final length	About 15,000 words (≈60 pages), excluding references; final scope set with the supervisor	About 25,000 words (≈90 pages), excluding references; final scope set with the supervisor
Supervision	Supervisor and second reader	Supervisor (or co-supervisors) and an examination board
Final assessment	Letter grade, assigned through the program after the supervisor and second reader assess the work	Oral defence; final result is Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory
Final submission	Corrected electronic copy to the Graduate Administrator for the School's records	Examination and final copies uploaded through Carleton Central; final copy proceeds to FGPA after supervisor approval
Recommended completion	End of Winter term of second year	End of Winter term of second year

On timing: the recommended completion above is a guide. You may defend a thesis or submit an MRE at the end of the Summer term of second year, but we advise finishing before Fall-term fees apply in September. Extensions are possible; submit an extension request to FGPA with your supervisor's support if you need more time.

Coursework pathway

The coursework pathway lets you complete the MA without an MRE or thesis. It consists of the two core HRSJ seminars plus 3.0 additional credits in 5000-level HRSJ courses or approved graduate courses from outside the program — usually about two or three half-credit courses per term in the Fall and Winter. Course availability varies, so plan your registration with the Graduate Advisor, and get approval before counting an outside course toward the degree. Students who begin in an MRE or thesis stream but decide to switch to coursework should consult the Graduate Advisor and Graduate Administrator.

Research essay (MRE) pathway

The MRE (HRSJ 5908) is a substantial, independent research project — broader and more rigorous than a course paper, but narrower than a thesis. A strong MRE demonstrates command of a defined area of human rights and social justice, critical engagement with relevant scholarship or practice, a coherent research question or objective, and an original analytical contribution. It is often more speculative and agenda-setting than a thesis: it may develop a new argument, establish a research agenda, synthesize a field in a distinctive way, or combine scholarly inquiry with research-creation. The aim is to write from a provocative and generative angle that gives insight into a concept, practice, or community.

Human Rights and Social Justice is a field of critical inquiry that draws on scholarly, artistic, and activist forms of knowledge, and we encourage students to engage different modes of knowledge production. If you would like your MRE to be research-creation oriented — combining creative and academic practice through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation — discuss form, evaluative criteria, documentation, and the relationship between creative and written components with your supervisor before you apply. Faculty trained in the humanities may have more experience guiding research-creation, but social scientists can absolutely supervise such work; you may want a committee that spans disciplines. The supervisory arrangement should provide the expertise your project needs.

MRE eligibility and application

The program currently considers the MRE pathway for students whose MA-level grades are at the A- level or higher. If your grades are below that threshold, speak with the Graduate Advisor about eligibility and any required approval.

The application package normally includes:

- the MA Thesis or MRE Application Form and the applicable advisory or second-reader form;
- a proposal of approximately 2,000–2,500 words, excluding references and appendices;
- a realistic work plan and timeline;
- a preliminary bibliography;
- a recent, ungraded sample of your academic writing; and
- any other material requested by the Graduate Committee.

Forms are available on the School resources and forms page. The completed MRE is assessed by the supervisor and a second reader; you then address any required corrections and submit a clean electronic copy to the Graduate Administrator.

Summer fieldwork? Note the earlier deadline

If you plan to do fieldwork for your MRE in the summer term, you must submit your application by the last Friday in February. This gives the committee time to review it and gives you time to obtain ethics approval before the summer. Miss this deadline and you may not be able to begin fieldwork in the summer term.

Thesis pathway

The thesis (HRSJ 5909) is a sustained, independent research project with a purposeful focus on a specific topic or argument, supported by the theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and evidence standards recognized across our interdisciplinary fields — human rights and social justice, women's and gender studies, sexuality studies, critical disability studies, and critical race studies. It demonstrates competence in the research process, critical command of a field, and the ability to develop and support an argument or apply knowledge in an original way. In HRSJ, a strong thesis explains how the research advances understanding, informs practice or activism, or offers a significant intervention in relevant debates.

Critical programs draw on multiple practices of knowledge creation, and we welcome new initiatives and interventions from our students. Research-creation is welcome where it suits the question and is supported by appropriate supervision. As with the MRE, agree in advance on the relationship between

creative and written components, the evidence of research to be presented, and the criteria for examination.

Thesis eligibility and application

The program currently considers the thesis pathway for students whose MA-level grades are at the A-level or higher. Discuss eligibility, supervision, registration, and timing with the Graduate Advisor before you apply.

The application package must be submitted normally by **15 May** and includes:

- the MA Thesis or MRE Application Form and the MRE or Thesis Advisory Committee Form;
- a proposal of approximately 3,000–3,750 words, excluding references and appendices, stating a title, a clear topic statement and research question(s), your theoretical framework, and the methods you plan to use;
- a work plan with a feasible timeline to defence and final deposit;
- a preliminary bibliography;
- a recent, ungraded writing sample; and
- any other material requested by the Graduate Committee.

Consult FGPA's thesis templates and formatting resources for the title page, copyright language, and formatting. A thesis is normally about 25,000 words (excluding references and appendices), but the final length, structure, and format must be agreed with your supervisor and be appropriate to the project.

Finding and working with a supervisor

All faculty who have permission from FGPA to supervise welcome the opportunity to do so — training graduate students is part of their teaching and research work — but faculty do choose the projects they take on. A potential supervisor must have suitable expertise and be eligible to supervise the degree work you propose.

Do not take a “no” personally. A faculty member may decline because they are already supervising many students and could not give you the attention you deserve; because they are going on sabbatical or leave; because of their own research commitments that year; or because your topic or methodology sits outside their expertise and someone else would serve you better. Whatever the reason, keep going — and if you are unsure whom to approach, ask the Graduate Advisor or other HRSJ faculty for suggestions.

Where to start

Approach HRSJ faculty first. The School is fortunate to have several well-known cross-listed faculty who are often able to supervise (see the website for who is cross-listed). You can also look beyond cross-listed faculty: read departmental websites to learn about potential supervisors and their research interests. Aim to identify two or three faculty whose research and supervisory eligibility fit your project, and start with your strongest fit.

The anatomy of a first email

Email potential supervisors one at a time, beginning with your top choice. A good first email is short and professional, and usually does the following:

1. Introduce yourself — your current area of research (a working title for your MA/MRE), your year, and what stage you are at (reading, writing, first draft, and so on).
2. Say why you are contacting them — show that you have done your homework and know who they are and what they work on.
3. Explain your work briefly — your research interests and anything pertinent, kept professional and academic (no more than about three sentences).
4. Ask whether they would like more information, and request a short meeting to discuss further.

After you send it

1. If you have not heard back in about two weeks, send one courteous reminder about your original email.
2. If there is still no reply about a week later, move on to the next person on your list.
3. If they reply or ask to meet, that does not mean they have agreed to supervise you — it means you have piqued their interest and they want to learn more.

Preparing for the first meeting

A first meeting is exploratory. It does not commit either of you to a supervisory relationship; it is a chance to see whether the project, working styles, availability, and expectations fit. Come prepared to:

- Make a strong first impression. Show you are serious and can talk about your ideas in accessible language, whatever stage you are at. If you are still early, show that you are open to being trained, disciplined, and focused — for example, talk about what you are reading now or a class that shaped your interests.
- Connect your interests to their work. Faculty are passionate about their research and usually enjoy discussing it with students. Showing genuine common ground helps establish the intellectual relationship you will rely on.
- Ask about supervisory style. Do they encourage students to work independently, or do they prefer regular meetings and frequent submissions? Neither is better, but if you need a lot of contact you will not thrive with a hands-off supervisor. Ask, too, whether they give extensive feedback on each section or chapter, and what their typical turnaround is (two weeks? a month?).
- Talk honestly about expectations. Be upfront about timelines, submission of work, and the caliber of work expected — and about your own strengths and areas where you will need guidance (for example, strong writing but less confidence with theory or methods). This is often when you will get reassurance about how they will mentor you through the hard parts.
- Cover the practicalities where relevant — data ownership, authorship, copyright, confidentiality, and research-creation rights — and how you will raise concerns or changes in the relationship.

Afterward, thank them and agree on when each of you will follow up. Both of you may need time to reflect on whether this could be a productive working relationship. If you decide to work with someone else, say so promptly and respectfully — and remember that others are likely approaching the same faculty, so do not take too long.

Carleton's Graduate Supervision — Responsibilities and Expectations Policy sets shared expectations: regular communication, timely and constructive feedback, agreed schedules, professional conduct, and joint attention to program and FGPA requirements.

A note from us

Speaking with a faculty member can feel daunting, but remember: we were all graduate students once, and we can relate to where you are. We want you to get the most out of your time in the School, so do not be afraid to ask pointed questions to work out whether someone is a good fit for you. You deserve a supervisor who will help you meet — and exceed — your goals.

Writing an MRE or thesis proposal

A proposal is the road map for the research you will carry out to fulfill your degree. Every student writing a thesis or MRE submits one. A proposal is a reasoned plan, not a prediction of your final argument: it should establish a significant, feasible project; show how it relates to relevant scholarship or practice; explain how the inquiry will be conducted; identify ethical and practical constraints; and set a realistic schedule. Much of what you write may change as you go deeper — that is entirely expected — but major changes should be discussed with your supervisor and may require an ethics amendment or program approval.

Your supervisor's role is to help you formulate and articulate your early ideas and to comment on drafts. The proposal is where weeks of abstract discussion finally take written form, so dedicate real time — especially to the theoretical approach and the methodology, which are the most significant sections. A solid proposal becomes the concrete road map (think of it as your GPS) that keeps you focused as you write.

Word ranges, not page counts

The ranges below replace older page-count guidance and are approximate. The overall length and the needs of your project matter more than the words allotted to any one section, and your supervisor may approve a different structure.

Component	What it should do	Suggested range
Title and overview	Give a concise working title and orient the reader to the topic, problem, and purpose.	100–200 words
Problem and research questions	Define the problem or objective, explain why it matters, and state focused questions.	400–700 words
Context	Identify the historical, political, geographic, cultural, or institutional conditions needed to understand the project.	300–600 words
Literature and theoretical approach	Position the project in relevant scholarship or practice; identify concepts, debates, tensions, or gaps; explain the framework guiding the analysis.	700–1,200 words
Methodology and methods	Explain the approach, sources or participants, materials, analysis, limitations, positionality, and fit between method and question.	500–900 words
Expected contribution	Describe the contribution the project is positioned to make, without presenting anticipated outcomes as established findings.	200–400 words
Structure and timeline	Outline MRE sections or thesis chapters and give realistic milestones for research, drafting, feedback, revision, examination, and submission.	250–500 words

The components in more detail

Title and title page. Give your work a tentative title. It can — and probably will — change, but titles matter: they convey the core ideas, theory, and research area, and sometimes the time period. It need not be creative, but it should be short and clear (a sub-title is fine), and it should communicate the main idea to your reader.

Introduction, problem, and research questions. Describe your topic, context, and focus. Set the stage with the background to your study, state the research questions that will guide and narrow it, and introduce the theoretical approach you will use and why. Good questions can be answered within your time and resources, and they guide everything that follows — the literature review, the framework, the methodology, and the analysis.

Context. Identify the historical, political, geographic, cultural, economic, or institutional conditions a reader needs in order to understand the project, and explain why your chosen setting or period is appropriate.

Literature review and theoretical approach. Scholars position their own research through a literature review. It is never comprehensive — you cannot include everything — but it offers an overview of the work most relevant to your topic: the major thinkers, scholarship, reports, archives, or activist knowledge that bear on it. As in the reading reflections and critical book analyses you did as an undergraduate, discuss how others have approached the subject by (a) giving brief, focused descriptions of these sources — What

were the authors' main research questions? What key concepts did they introduce that influence your work? What did they argue, and what are the strengths or weaknesses of that argument for your project? Perhaps you agree with certain thinkers and want to test whether their argument holds for the community or region you are studying; perhaps you take issue with a concept because it misses something you find crucial. Then (b) show where your study fits: Does it fill a gap? Does it add a crucial dimension — for example, by “queering” a topic?

Note: *this guidance reflects social-science conventions more than humanities or research-creation approaches. All students must show informed engagement with relevant knowledge, but you and your supervisor may present that engagement differently where it better suits your discipline and project.*

Methodology and methods. In its simplest form, methodology is the approach you take to studying your topic and how you will carry it out — the data, materials, sources, or archives you will use. Indicate whether you will use discourse analysis, interviews, surveys, participant observation, creative practice, and so on. Then justify the choice by answering: How will this methodology help you answer your research questions — what are its strengths for your study? What are its limitations, and how will you handle them? Also address access, positionality, and ethical considerations, and explain how you will analyze your material.

Expected contribution. Describe the contribution your project is positioned to make to scholarship, practice, policy, creative work, or activism. A proposal does not present findings as established facts; it explains the kinds of insight the research may make possible and why they would matter.

Structure and timeline. Give a rough outline of your MRE sections or thesis chapters and a realistic schedule. Indicate how many chapters you expect, when you think you will have at least two drafts of each, and when you will submit the final draft — with a tentative defence date for a thesis. Be realistic and account for the rest of your life: as a TA you will be busy marking midterms and finals, and an RAship may demand more time at certain points. Many faculty advise students not to count on December for writing, given grading and the holidays (for you and your supervisor alike).

References. Include every source you cite, plus a limited selection of works central to your planned research, in one consistent citation style. The reference list is normally excluded from the proposal word count unless the School states otherwise.

Questions your proposal should answer

- What is the central research question or objective, and why does it matter?
- How does the project build on, challenge, or extend relevant knowledge or practice?
- What theoretical or conceptual approach guides the inquiry, and why is it suitable?
- What materials, participants, archives, texts, or creative practices will you use, and how will you gather and analyze them?
- What are the limitations, ethical issues, risks, and practical constraints?
- Who are the intended audiences, and how will you explain key terms accessibly?
- Can the work be completed within the proposed time and resources?

Research ethics

If your research involves human participants — interviews, focus groups, surveys, participant observation, some uses of secondary data, or research conducted outside Carleton — it must be reviewed by the appropriate Carleton University Research Ethics Board unless the Board confirms an exemption applies. This process is governed by the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2). Do not recruit participants or collect data before you have final ethics clearance. Projects involving another organization may also need that organization's permission or ethics approval.

Discuss ethics with your supervisor while you develop your proposal. Ethics review takes time: current Carleton guidance indicates that minimal-risk reviews often take two to three weeks and full-board reviews four to six weeks, with more time for revisions — and busy periods or complex projects can take longer. Build this into your timeline and submit early.

See the Office of Research Ethics and the current ethics forms and templates, including submission dates.

Planning to completion

Work backward from your intended completion or graduation date, and leave time for each stage: proposal approval, ethics review, research, drafting, supervisor feedback, revision, second-reader assessment or defence scheduling, post-examination revisions, and final submission. University deadlines are not writing deadlines — by the listed submission date, your thesis must already be supervisor-approved and in examinable form.

Target	Normal deadline (verify online each year)	Planning implication
Spring graduation	Normally April 1 — the last day to submit a supervisor-approved thesis in examinable form to the department	Plan backward for supervisor review, notice to the department, upload, defence, revisions, and final deposit.
Summer thesis submission	Normally July 15 — the last day to submit a supervisor-approved thesis in examinable form to the department	This does not guarantee the final thesis can be deposited before fall registration or fee deadlines. Confirm the full schedule with the Graduate Administrator.
MRE completion	Program deadline, set internally	Agree on a submission date that leaves time for the second reader, corrections, grade submission, and graduation processing.

Confirm the dates each year

The thesis submission deadlines are normally April 1 (for spring graduation) and July 15 (for summer submission), but they can change from year to year — always confirm the current dates on the Academic Year page and against the School's internal schedule. Fee consequences depend on your registration and final-deposit timing, so get individual advice before making a financial decision.

Submitting and defending a thesis

The structure of the defence — when it happens, who is in the room, and the procedures — is regulated by the Carleton Senate and the current Thesis Examination Policy. The procedures are highly standardized and designed to ensure fairness for you, the candidate.

Before you submit

- Agree with your supervisor that the thesis is in examinable form and meets HRSJ and FGPA requirements.
- Notify your supervisor, the department, and the Graduate Administrator at least two weeks before the date you intend to submit.
- The examinable thesis must be submitted to the department at least four weeks before the intended examination date; the defence is then scheduled and announced at least two weeks in advance.
- Follow the School's instructions for naming the examination board, scheduling the defence, and uploading the examination copy through Carleton Central. The current policy requires the master's examination copy to be uploaded at least three weeks before the defence.
- Review the thesis formatting guidelines, checklist, academic-integrity statement, copyright requirements, and privacy considerations before uploading.

Who is in the room

The examination board normally includes:

- **the external examiner** — an academic who is an expert in your field but has not read your work before this point (an arm's-length member from outside your home program);
- **the internal examiner** — an eligible HRSJ or cross-listed faculty member you may know, who has seen earlier work but has not commented on or edited your examinable thesis;
- **your supervisor (or co-supervisors); and**
- **the Chair of the defence** — usually the Graduate Advisor — who runs the proceedings. The Chair's role is the most neutral in the room. If you feel uncomfortable, feel ill, or need to stop, the Chair is the person you turn to, and they will follow your instructions.

What to expect during the defence

1. Before you enter, the Chair meets privately with the board to review the procedure and possible outcomes, and confirms that the defence should proceed (even though this was already confirmed about a week earlier).
2. The Chair invites you in, introduces everyone, and explains the order of the examination.
3. You may give a short opening presentation (about 5 minutes) if you wish; appropriate audio-visual methods are fine.
4. First round: examiners take turns, and no one interrupts. The external has about 20 minutes, the internal about 15, and your supervisor(s) about 15 each (they may forego their time). The Chair keeps time. The number of questions you get depends on how long your answers run, since the time is fixed. This round usually lasts about an hour and ten minutes.

5. The Chair usually offers a short break (about 5 minutes) after the first round; you may leave the room.
6. Second round: the Chair invites the external to continue, with more fluid timing, and the discussion usually opens up. The Chair makes sure both the external and the internal can ask anything they did not get to. This round usually lasts about 30 minutes.
7. At the close, the Chair asks whether you have concluding remarks. No one may interrupt — you have the last word — though you are not obliged to give them.
8. You are asked to step out (don't go far!) while the board deliberates on the written work and the oral defence and completes and signs the required paperwork.
9. The Chair invites you back and announces the result verbally, with brief details of the outcome and any required revisions. A master's defence normally does not exceed two hours.
10. The defence is over. Congratulations.

After the defence

Complete the revisions the board requires and obtain the specified approvals. Upload the final copy through Carleton Central for supervisor approval and forwarding to FGPA. The degree is not complete until all program requirements and final-submission steps are satisfied. See the current Thesis Examination Policy, thesis requirements, and thesis checklist.

Remember

Your supervisor has been through this process and is your best guide to any questions. You are also welcome to talk it through with the Graduate Advisor or Graduate Administrator. Everyone involved is invested in your success.

Submitting an MRE

1. Agree with your supervisor on the final submission date, and allow enough time for review before the second reader receives the MRE.
2. Submit the supervisor-approved MRE to the second reader through the process the School specifies (normally about two weeks before the agreed date for the second reader to send a mark to the supervisor).
3. Complete any required corrections and confirm them with your supervisor.
4. Submit a clean electronic copy to the Graduate Administrator for the School's records, and confirm the final grade has been processed.

When your plans change

Research plans and personal circumstances change — that is normal. Contact your supervisor, the Graduate Advisor, and the Graduate Administrator as early as you can if you might miss a milestone, need to change pathway or scope, require a leave or extension, run into supervisory difficulty, or need an accommodation. Some changes require formal program or FGPA approval; an informal conversation does not replace the required form or decision, but it almost always creates more options.

FGPA maintains the current forms and policies for registration changes, leaves, extensions, supervision, thesis examinations, grade reviews, petitions, and appeals.

Final checklist

- I have verified my pathway and remaining degree requirements in the current Graduate Calendar.
- My registration is correct for the current and next term.
- My supervisor and I have agreed on scope, milestones, feedback expectations, and a completion plan.
- I have obtained all required program approvals and research-ethics clearance before beginning any regulated research.
- I have checked the current academic schedule rather than relying on last year's dates.
- I have allowed time for assessment or defence, revisions, final submission, and graduation processing.
- I have kept the Graduate Administrator informed and kept copies of approvals and submitted forms.

Good luck with your research and your time in the program. Every faculty member in the School is happy to answer your questions, share ideas, and offer a helping hand — questions are always welcome, and asking early usually opens up more options.