

Guidelines for Theses/ Research Essays

**M.A. in MUSIC AND CULTURE
School for Studies in Art and Culture**

Carleton University

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Overview

Students should view the relevant links from the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs website, which is the definitive source for graduate regulations.

For FGPA **thesis requirements** and **thesis preparation guidelines**, including FGPA deadlines, submission specifications, and licensing information, see:
<http://www.carleton.ca/fgpa/thesis-requirements/>

For FGPA **thesis examination policies**, see:
<http://www.carleton.ca/fgpa/thesis-requirements/>

The guidelines that follow are provided to augment the Graduate Faculty information.¹ They are in no sense the final word. The student should direct any further questions to the Music and Culture Graduate Supervisor, his/her thesis/research essay supervisor or the Graduate Administrator of the School for Studies in Art and Culture. It is essential to ask early; the student should not wait until time has expired or he/she is totally tied up in red tape before asking for assistance.

Theses and Research Essays

1. Introduction

The thesis/research essay is the most important component of the student's MA program. It will be the critical test of success as a graduate student, and recommendations for further study or for employment will be based heavily on it. One purpose of our graduate courses is to provide the academic background and research skills necessary for a satisfactory research project.

There is a tendency for students to concentrate during the Fall and Winter terms on course readings and assignments, and to put off decisions about the thesis/research essay until late in the Spring term, resulting in the loss of the summer as a constructive research period. The effective definition of a topic demands a good deal of thought, reading and preliminary research; it cannot be done quickly and therefore must be initiated early. Faculty members also need to know their commitments in advance. Students trying to define a topic during the summer, without having secured the prior agreement of a thesis/research essay supervisor, are apt to find that no one is available until September. It is considered normal to complete the M.A. with a thesis in fewer than six terms, but only if a topic and thesis/research essay supervisor have been arranged and serious work on the thesis proposal has begun during the second term of the first year.

For all of these reasons, the Music and Culture MA program requires that the full-time student submits a complete thesis/research essay proposal by the end of the Winter

¹ This document is based upon guidelines established by the M.A. in Film Studies.

term, for approval by the Graduate Committee. The thesis/research essay proposal is intended to ensure not only that you start thinking about your project in good time but also that you get early advice in planning it. To facilitate the writing of the proposal, the Graduate Committee will assign to the student a proposal supervisor at the beginning of the Winter term, who may or may not serve as the thesis/research essay supervisor. It is seldom wise to choose a topic for which faculty expertise is not available: unless appropriate outside supervision can be arranged, you may be left with less direction than MA students generally need. (The University cannot pay for outside supervision.) Topics most commonly arise from seminar papers, directed reading courses or from interests that students bring into the program.

By the end of the second term (April 15), full time students will be asked to submit a full thesis proposal to the Graduate Supervisor. Part-time students should submit this proposal six weeks after the end of the fifth term.

Proposals will be assessed and approved by the Graduate Committee, and recommendations for changes will be communicated to students and the proposal supervisor. Recommendations can range from the acceptance of the proposal as is to the requirement for a complete rewrite or change of topic. Approval from this committee is necessary before a thesis/research essay may proceed. Once the student obtains approval for the proposal, a thesis/research essay supervisor will be assigned, based on his/her experience with the topic, availability and work load (the student may request a specific thesis/research essay supervisor, but the Graduate Committee reserves the right to make a final decision).

If the student is using material (documents) in private hands or interviewing people, he/she will need follow the Ethical Guidelines of Carleton University that require a permission form to be signed by those concerned (see below, 2.8). The thesis/research essay proposal must include these forms, filled out to the best of the student's knowledge.

A thesis has an upper limit of 100 pages of text, not counting the bibliography and notes, and is rarely shorter than 80 pages - roughly 25,000-30,000 words.

A research essay has an upper limit of 50 pages of text, not counting the bibliography and notes, and is rarely shorter than 40 pages – roughly 12,500-15,000 words.

An MA Thesis, while it must be carefully circumscribed in scope, must address itself to a question of academic interest to the field. It must accomplish a thorough and scholarly investigation of its subject and make a contribution to the study of it. A thesis must have a thesis: that is, it must place before the reader a proposition, an argument or hypothesis which it attempts to demonstrate or test.

An MA Research Essay is substantially smaller than the thesis. While the research essay requires the same bibliographic apparatus, etc. as the thesis, student and advisor are advised to select a topic that can be thoroughly covered in the limited space. Topics for research essays may have a more practical orientation.

2. Preparing a Thesis/Research Essay Proposal

The student should understand from the beginning that a thesis proposal is not a mere declaration of interest in some topic, but the definition of a manageable research problem and of the way in which he/she intends to deal with it. It is a normal experience for the student to find that the proposal must be revised before approval.

This proposal should have the following elements:

- Abstract (no more than 150 words)
- Statement of the issue under investigation
- Justification for and importance of the topic
- Relationship to existing scholarship
- Objectives and methodology
- Chapter breakdown
- Preliminary bibliography

2.1. Abstract

This is the thesis statement. It is a short synopsis of the main argument, identifying the central topics and outlining the questions for discussion.

2.2 Statement of the Issue under Investigation

This paragraph should begin with a general statement of the issue under investigation. As an opening statement, it cannot engage in detail, but it should state the overall area of interest, the nature of the issue itself, the range of subject matter relevant to it and the limits beyond which the student does not intend to proceed.

2.3. Justification for and Importance of the Topic

Here the student needs to make a case for the topic itself: Why is it worthy of treatment in a thesis/research essay? What is its importance for the field? A succinct statement should suffice.

2.4. Relationship to Existing Scholarship

Once the issue has been identified, the proposal should review the existing literature that bears on it. Some of the studies in the bibliography will be of special importance, either because they address the research issue directly or because they employ relevant concepts. The proposal should include systematic comment on those studies. In providing a critique of the works in question, the student should outline the intellectual context from which the topic has been approached and the depth to which it has been

investigated. The comment should end by explaining in general terms, the relation between the works reviewed and the proposed study. Which of them will the thesis accept or reject; what is there about the issue that they have left uninvestigated; how will the thesis contribute to their discussions? If the student cannot answer those questions, he/she has not yet defined a viable problem for research.

2.5. Objectives and Methodology

With the research issue identified and its relation to previous work described, it is now possible to be specific about the objectives of the proposed inquiry. This section should go into some detail about the questions to be asked, the hypotheses or arguments for adoption, the method of analysis and the theoretical paradigms by which the author hopes to sustain the hypotheses or arguments and the availability of evidence amenable to that method. The discussion here should include *anticipated* outcomes from the research.

2.6 Chapter Breakdown

The student should arrange the project into chapters by providing a short summary of the contents of each. It may be helpful for him/her to indicate what music will be analyzed in each of the chapters, and if possible, to note their relevance to the questions and arguments discussed in each individual chapter. See Section 4.2 for an explanation of what the introductory and concluding chapters are expected to include.

2.7 Preliminary Bibliography

The proposal should list the main sources for the project, primary and secondary. Such a list should include scores, recordings, internet videos, interviews, manuscripts and any other similar primary sources that will play a role in the thesis/research essay. This bibliography should also refer to the secondary studies mentioned in the section dealing with existing scholarship as well any other that are directly related to your argument and approach. It is important to use the Chicago Manual of Style (available online through the library) for proper referencing of these materials. See below, Section 3.2, for general guidelines.

The details of these plans will of course be tentative, subject to revision as the research proceeds. It would be exceptional for the thesis/research essay to correspond entirely to the original proposal; it should be expected that research will lead to refinements in topic and approach. If the student deviates significantly from what was originally approved, then it is prudent to submit an amended proposal. If there is any doubt about the need for a statement of amendment, he/she should check with the thesis/research essay supervisor or the Music and Culture Graduate Supervisor.

Drafting the proposal should not be an isolating experience. The Music and Culture Graduate Supervisor and the proposal supervisor will both have to see it in the end and should be consulted at the beginning. The student should make use of any other advice, bearing in mind that "make use of" does not mean "accept uncritically".

2.8 Ethics Clearance

If your project involves work with human subjects (interviews, for example), it must be reviewed and approved by the University's Ethics Committee as part of the approval process. In the proposal, students must identify individuals, communities and/or organizations with which they plan to work. Guidelines and forms for ethics approval are available from the Graduate Administrator, or at the following website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/curo/regulatory-compliances/ethics>. It is essential to identify and deal with ethics approval requirements as early as possible, since the approval process can take several months. There are deadlines students must meet in order for the ethics applications to be reviewed/approved in a timely fashion. **Interviewing cannot proceed until ethics approval has been given.**

3. Critical Apparatus for the Thesis/Research Essay

Every work relies on other publications on the same or related subjects (secondary sources) and on manuscript collections, archives, scores recordings, films or videos, personal interviews, books, reports and others (primary sources.) Notes, bibliographies, appendices, tables, charts, graphs and so on, are collectively known as the critical or scholarly apparatus of a thesis. The necessity for them arises from two central conventions of scholarly reporting.

The first convention is that the sources of any work must be clearly declared. That is the purpose of notes and bibliographies: the notes give the source of statements made in the text, the bibliographies show the range of sources that have been consulted.

Taken together, the notes and the bibliography enable readers to identify the origin of statements, to check their accuracy and to judge the thoroughness of research. Since we are certifying the student's abilities as a researcher/scholar in this process, these are central to it.

The second convention of scholarly reporting is that the organization of a study must be made clear. Theses are therefore to be arranged in chapters, with titles and numbers, listed in a table of contents. Chapter titles and the main title itself should unambiguously indicate their subject matter. Appendices, tables and any other form of information set apart from the text must be titled, numbered and listed. In addition, University regulations require you to provide an **abstract**, which is not to exceed **150 words**. Since its object is to facilitate reference by other scholars, it should be a synopsis of your main argument, identifying your central topics and conclusions.

3.1 Documentation: Notes

It is neither feasible nor necessary to give a reference for every statement that you make. Much of what you write will be uncontroversial or already well attested. All direct quotations or paraphrases must have references; failure to acknowledge them constitutes plagiarism. That is not merely an error but an offence, subject to penalties

which are listed in the Graduate Calendar under "Instructional Offences" and which include expulsion from the University. Notes are also necessary for those statements that are disputed, problematic, novel, textual, historical or statistical, and for those that are critically important for your argument. Notes ordinarily need do no more than give references.

The *Chicago Manual of Style* includes guidelines to two basic systems for notes documenting the text. The humanities (or documentary-note) style is favoured by the arts, literature and history, and the author-date system is used in the physical, natural and social sciences. The numbered notes used in the humanities style can be placed at the bottom of each page (footnotes) or grouped either at the end of each chapter (endnotes). Either arrangement is acceptable for a thesis, so long as it is appropriate to the kind of sources used and so long as the established conventions are consistently followed (see Appendix 1 for a list of acceptable style guides available for music).

3.2 Documentation: Bibliography

The bibliography is a list of consulted sources – they need not all have been cited in the notes, but their relevance to your text must be clear. Primary sources used (interviews, documents, etc.) should be separately listed with as much detail as necessary, such as the date and place of interviews. The guides in Appendix 1 or the online *Chicago Manual of Style* provide detailed information about issues of format, acceptable abbreviations, etc.

3.3 Other Critical Apparati

The topic may require the inclusion of information that should be set apart from the text because there is more of it than the text can reasonably accommodate. Such information may take the form of illustrations, facsimiles, musical examples, interview transcripts, whole documents like complete letters, and other primary sources. These appendices should contain captions with bibliographic information for the individual items.

4. Standards of Presentation for the Thesis/Research Essay

Your examiners will expect clearly written and logically arranged work. To facilitate their appraisal of your scholarship, they will also expect you to provide an adequate critical apparatus consistent with the advice given above in Section 3. Further, there are some rules specific to the University about the format of your final manuscript.

4.1 Prose Style

The thesis/research paper should be written with order, clarity and precision. Errors in grammar or spelling, if only occasional, are less problematic than incoherence in organization and argument or inaccuracy in documentation, but they are nevertheless unacceptable. The student may want to consult some of the many guides to English usage that are in print. Regarding such stylistic details as the use of first person and

discipline-based jargon, the writer should consult his/her thesis or research-essay supervisor.

4.2a. Organization: Theses

The organization of the text should reflect the form and stages of the research and analysis. The introductory chapter should review the literature of the topic, explain the method and comment on sources. In addition, it should explain and justify the limits set for the inquiry, sketch the background of the topic and reveal the argument for development. Its general objective is to give readers an adequate context in which to approach the substantive chapters. It is helpful to readers if the writer maps out for them briefly where each chapter will take them.

Chapters should be divided from one another in some plainly logical way. Titled sections within chapters may be appropriate, although they are never a substitute for a coherent order of material. Each chapter should mark a step in the advance of the argument and should end by making clear what that step has been.

The thesis should end with an explicit statement of its conclusions as a final chapter. A summary of the earlier chapters is inadequate as a conclusion: it should give a unified picture of the research. If possible, the concluding chapter could offer a judgment on the implications of the research and suggest what fresh lines of inquiry may be opened by it.

4.2b. Organization: Research Essays

The smaller dimensions of the research essay does not remove the necessity for clear organization. It is expected that the research essay will include an introduction and conclusion, surrounding several sections, if not chapters, in which the argument is developed. All of this occurs on a more modest scale than in the thesis, yet the organizing principle remains that the research essay introduces, develops and brings to conclusion the underlying research issue.

4.3a. Defence Copies: Theses

The student submits five loose-leaf copies of the thesis for the examining committee in envelopes, at his/her own cost. The copies must be carefully proof-read, with errors corrected in type. Thesis copies become final when amended after examination (see below, section 5). Audio-visual materials that are part of the thesis must also be distributed in five copies.

4.3b. Faculty Readers' Copies: Research Essays

The student submits three loose-leaf copies of the research essay for review by faculty members, at his/her own cost. The copies must be carefully proof-read, with errors corrected in type. Research essay copies become final when amended after faculty readers submit their comments (see below, section 5). Audio-visual materials that are part of the research essay must also be distributed in three copies.

4.4a. *Format of Theses*

Thesis writers should consult the FGPA website for details about the style of pagination and the format of the abstract, title page, text pages, preliminary pages, illustrative material and critical apparatus:

<http://www1.carleton.ca/fgpa/thesis-requirements/formatting>

4.4b. *Format of Research Essays*

Students writing a research essay should adhere wherever possible to the same guidelines as those for thesis writers.

5. Defence of a Thesis

When the thesis has been submitted, it will be read by an examining board and then the student will participate in a public defence. Note that observers, while they may attend without notice, may not take part in the examination. Such defences are normal academic practice, but there are some rules specific to the University that must be followed.

5.1 *Deadlines for Submission of Final Copies*

The student is required to give his/her thesis supervisor and the Graduate Supervisor at least two weeks' notice of the date on which he/she intends to submit copies for examination. The copies must be received by the School's Graduate Administrator not later than March 1 for graduation at the Spring Convocation, and by August 1 or December 1 for Fall or Winter graduation, respectively. Examining boards take time to arrange; moreover, their date and composition must be announced four weeks in advance. The student must therefore allow at least two weeks between the dates of submission and examination. Towards the beginning or end of a term, when boards are most often held, an interval of more than two weeks may be more realistic.

5.2. *Examining Boards*

Boards are appointed by the Music and Culture Graduate Supervisor, in consultation with the relevant thesis supervisor. Students may suggest possible examiners, but do not have approval over their appointment.

<p>The board will consist of four members including a chair, the thesis supervisor, a faculty member from the Music and Culture graduate program and one external examiner from outside the Music and Culture faculty.</p>
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The examining board will begin by allowing the student between 10 and 15 minutes to make a statement about the project. It is customary for the student to begin by explaining how he/she became interested in the topic and why it is worth attention. The

student may also take the opportunity to identify those parts of the work which in retrospect seem most important, as well as those of which the candidate might now consider modifying. The examiners will regard this opening statement as part of the defence.

There will normally be two rounds of questions. The first will involve each examiner asking questions (with the candidate providing answers) for about 20 minutes per person, starting with the external examiner, proceeding to the internal examiner, and concluding with the thesis supervisor. The second round will be more conversational. Boards normally take about 2 hours. The student will then be asked to leave while the examiners deliberate. The examiners' focus will be on the text and critical apparatus of the thesis. They will, however, often be obliged to depart from a strict adherence to that focus in order to test the candidate's knowledge of the sources and grasp of the issues raised by the topic.

Their report, of which the candidate will be given an oral statement at the end of the defence, will render separate judgments on the thesis and on the defence thereof. The examining board may accept a thesis as it stands, with or without a notation of distinction, or they may reject it entirely. They may require major changes, subject to the approval of all members of the board, or minor changes, subject only to the approval of the thesis supervisor. Most often, the candidate is required to make minor changes prior to final submission of the thesis.

6. Deposit of the Defended Thesis

At the defence, the student will be asked to sign the "Licence to Carleton University" form, which authorizes the University to make copies of the thesis. When the defence has been successful and the student has received the necessary approval of whatever changes the examiners have required, he/she must submit two revised final copies of the thesis to the Graduate Administrator of the School to be forwarded to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs. If audio or video material accompanies a thesis, one copy is required.

It is the student's responsibility to see that the pages are in order and to ensure that no pages are missing, with all corrections made and any accompanying material included. If the copies are submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs before the last day for late registration in any term, the student will avoid paying fees for that term. According to FGPA policy, the cost of all duplication is to be borne by the student.

7. Unique Issues for the Research Essay

In most details, the research essay and the accompanying procedures mirror those of the thesis. However, the research essay may be more exploratory than a thesis, and it often serves to raise more questions than it answers. While a research essay will be unified and directed by a central focus, it does not require the tight organization of a thesis. It may clarify a concept, define a method, resolve a dilemma, provide a

systematic critique of the literature, or identify a new area or methodology for research, in ways that, while appropriate for a research essay, would form only part of a thesis.

In contrast with the thesis, research essays do not require a formal examination. Three copies of the completed research essay are to be submitted to the Graduate Supervisor. The student must allow a full month for the evaluation process. For graduation at the Spring Convocation, this means submission by April 1, and by August 1 and December 1 respectively for Fall or Winter graduation. The research essay will be read by two readers, chosen by the Graduate Supervisor in consultation with the research essay supervisor. One of the readers will be the research essay supervisor. Once the readers have completed their work, the student and two readers will informally meet to discuss the research essay. The student will receive a written evaluation from each reader – the student will then be asked to make recommended corrections before the final submission. However, he/she will not be asked to undertake large-scale revisions, unless the anticipated grade is below a B-. In this case, the student may request in writing the privilege of revising and resubmitting the research essay. This is a privilege that can be granted only once. After the research essay has been satisfactorily revised, the student will submit two copies to the Graduate Supervisor for deposit with the M.A. in Music and Culture program. Like for theses, students bear the costs of duplication. Upon submission of the revised research essay, the student will receive an official notification of the grade (from A+ down), which is an averaging of the two grades assigned (a grade of B- or better is required). The student should contact the Graduate Supervisor with questions that are not addressed here.

APPENDIX 1. List of Guides Generally Recommended

A. Editorial Style

The Canadian Style: A Guide to Writing and Editing. 1985 corrected reprint Toronto: Dundurn, for the Secretary of State and the Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1987.

***The Chicago Manual of Style. The Essential Guide for Writers, Editors and Publishers* (14th ed.) Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993.**

Archival Citations: Suggestions for the Citation of Documents at the Public Archives of Canada. Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1983.

Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs, "Guidelines, Policy and Procedures for Comprehensive and Thesis Examinations and the Preparation of Theses". rev. ed. unpublished: February 1985. Section B, "The Preparation of Theses", by H. Brown.

Lester, J. D. *Citing Cyberspace. To Accompany Writing Research Papers: A Complete Guide*. Boston: Addison-Wesley Publ. Co., 1999.

Turabian, K.L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 4th ed. 1973 (1937).

B. English Usage

Follett, W. *Modern American Usage: A Guide*. ed. and completed by J. Barzun et al. New York: Hill and Wang, 1966.

Fowler, H.W. *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*. 1926. 2nd ed. re. by E. Gowers 1965. corrected reprint Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983.

Gowers, E. *The Complete Plain Words*. 1954. Pelican ed. London: Penguin, 1962.
The Oxford Guide to the English Language. corrected reprint Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984.

Partridge, E. *Usage and Abusage: A Guide to Good English*. 1947. rev. ed. 1957
Penguin ed. London: Penguin, 1963.

C. Music-Specific Bibliographic Sources

Herbert, T. *Music in Words: A Guide to Researching & Writing about Music*. New York: Oxford, 2009.

Wingell, R. *Writing about Music: An Introductory Guide*. 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2008.

APPENDIX 2: *Format of Title Page*

(Title Centered)

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by

Name of Author and Degree

A (thesis) submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Music and Culture

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

(Date of first Submission for formal examination)

Year, Name of Author

