

Master of Journalism

School of Journalism and Communication



THESIS

Format and Guidelines

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario**

2016 – 2017 academic year

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The Master of Journalism Thesis

A master's thesis in any discipline conveys the results of successful research in a specialized area. It showcases the candidate's knowledge of the subject, ability to use recognized techniques of investigation and critical evaluation, and skill in presenting these findings.

Each discipline has its own approach and requirements. The Graduate Calendar at <http://calendar.carleton.ca/grad> describes the Master of Journalism thesis this way:

M.J. Thesis. To fulfill the requirement of this two-credit thesis course, students must produce a major piece of journalistic research or complete an academic thesis in the area of Journalism Studies.

As this calendar entry indicates, there are two types of MJ thesis, and your first step is to decide which type you will choose.

I. Journalistic Research Thesis

This will involve production of a major piece of journalism, probably a book, based on extensive research and reporting. Unlike most journalism, however, it must be fully sourced with footnotes/endnotes and an extensive bibliography of documents and interviews. While this style doesn't need to include a formal literature review chapter, you must still incorporate all relevant existing contextual material in your thesis.

The subject should be a matter of public importance, and the work will be assessed according to high standards of professional journalism.

Examples include:

- R.M. Cribb, "Path to Glory: The social impact of the growth of Mormonism."
- Lisa Hébert, "A look at the Status of Women in Pakistan: Conflict over the Islamic Path."
- Ashifa Kassam, "What Happens When They Leave: The social impact of migration on the Philippines."
- Season L. Osborne, "Closing the Front Door of the Arctic: Capt. Joseph E. Brenner's role in Canadian Arctic sovereignty."
- Janice Tibbetts, "Made in Canada: Cultural Connections in the Lives of China Adoptees"

II. Academic Thesis in Journalism Studies

This will involve the study of the practice of journalism, journalism education, and/or the media of journalism. The thesis will normally set out a question or problem, review existing literature, and then produce either new data or an original analysis of the problem at hand.

The thesis will be written in the conventional academic style, with footnotes/endnotes, etc., and will be assessed according to academic criteria.

Examples include:

- Joel Bernbaum, "What They Said: Verbatim Theatre's Relationship to Journalism."

- Jennifer Ditchburn, “Journalistic Pathfinding: How the Parliamentary Press Gallery Adapted to News Management Under the Conservative Government of Stephen Harper”
- Brian Gorman, “Quebecor and Convergence: A case study.”
- Meredith Levine, “Consent and Consequences: Journalists’ Duty to Inform Subjects of Potential Harms”
- Peter H. Martyn, “Get Your ‘Mojos’ Working: How the techniques and technologies of mobile multimedia reporting affect the practice of journalism.”
- Dominique L. Price, “Inside the Wire: A study of Canadian embedded journalism in Afghanistan.”
- Denise Rudnicki, “Information or Persuasion: Government communication, the media and the same-sex marriage debate.”

Regardless of whether it is a journalistic or academic thesis, it will normally be 30,000 to 50,000 words in length (approximately 120 double-spaced pages), although there is no absolute minimum or maximum.

Examples of theses – including those mentioned above – can be found in the School of Journalism’s Reader’s Digest Resource Centre, in Carleton University’s MacOdrum Library, or online through a general search.

Stage One: Developing Your Idea

I. Getting started

Each student should formulate a thesis subject and discuss preliminary ideas with the Associate Director of the School (the head of the journalism program).

The process is as follows:

1. Write a preliminary one-page outline of your idea. This “one-pager” should have the following:
 - a. Short introductory paragraph that explains, in general terms, the area you wish to explore. Include your anticipated format—journalistic research or academic (this can change as you develop your idea over your course of study);
 - b. Paragraph containing a focus statement or research question(s) connected to your area of interest. Don’t worry if you’re unable to be specific at this point, just do the best you can and touch on what you think your general questions or arguments might be;
 - c. Paragraph or two that justifies the research you hope to do. Why do you think it’s important or necessary? What fresh insights do you hope to add to the existing debate or conversation?
 - d. Final paragraph about methodology. How do you think you’ll need to go about doing what you have in mind—through a case study or two? A series of interviews? The application of a theory or theories by specific scholars or experts?
 - e. Brief preliminary bibliography. If you’re in a position to do so, turn your one-pager into a two-pager by including a brief preliminary bibliography. What books and articles do you hope to consult? If you plan on doing interviews, whom do you think you’ll need to speak to? *Again, even if you’re doing a journalistic thesis, you’ll still need a literature review of sorts, one that includes existing contextual material.*
2. Send your one-pager electronically to the Journalism Graduate Supervisor.
3. Follow up by booking a meeting with the Journalism Graduate Supervisor to discuss the overall acceptability of the thesis topic and potential thesis supervisors.
4. On the advice of the Journalism Graduate Supervisor, the Journalism Program Head will arrange the final assigning of Thesis Supervisors and you cannot proceed without final signoff.
5. Remember that a clear working relationship between candidate and Thesis Supervisor is essential. Review the FGPA document outlining candidate/supervisor responsibilities and expectations <http://gradstudents.carleton.ca/thesis-requirements/graduate-supervision-responsibilities-expectations-policy/>

6. Send the following information to the Graduate Supervisor and Graduate Administrator (jourGrad@carleton.ca):

- Full name
- Student number
- Thesis type
- Thesis topic or title
- Faculty supervisor
- Expected graduation date.

II. Thesis proposal

Writing the thesis proposal is the next stage of the thesis process. The proposal is a substantial document, which can be produced adequately only after considerable research has been conducted in the thesis area.

The proposal is normally 10-15 pages in length, and generally contains a number of segments:

1. Introduction: The focus of the thesis, outlining both what the thesis will include and what it will exclude;
2. The reason(s) why this topic is an important one to tackle, journalistically, academically or pedagogically;
3. The scope and nature of the questions the thesis will ask, followed by a discussion of the research methods that will be employed, the sources to be consulted, and their general accessibility;
4. An outline of the contents of each chapter;
5. A preliminary bibliography;
6. Timetable for completion: Include proposed dates for completion of each segment of the thesis.

In formulating a proposal, beware of taking on too large a task, or of posing questions that are impossible to answer using the research method you want to use.

Students should think about using their elective courses as preparation for the thesis if at all possible. Consult the Graduate Calendar and the 4000-level courses in the Undergraduate Calendar for options that will provide either substantive background or methodological training that will assist in the thesis work.

Where such courses are not available, the student ought to consider the possibility of arranging a directed studies or directed readings course specially tailored to his or her needs.

III. Approval of proposal

Once the Thesis Supervisor and the student agree on a thesis proposal, the process is as follows:

1. The Thesis Supervisor sends an electronic copy of the proposal to the Journalism Program Head.
2. The Journalism Program Head will assign an Internal Examiner, and will forward the proposal to her/him for review. The feedback from the Internal Examiner may range from advice on how to proceed to requests for modifications. This process ensures as much as possible that the general thrust of the thesis is acceptable to the examiners.

3. Once the proposal has been approved by the Internal Examiner, and revised if necessary, the student will submit a clean electronic copy to the Graduate Administrator for the student's academic file.
4. The student will carry out the research and writing of the thesis. The student should be in close contact with the Thesis Supervisor throughout this process, and may wish to consult on particularly difficult matters with the Internal Examiner, although this should normally not be necessary and should only be done in consultation with the Thesis Supervisor.

At the end of each term, the Journalism Graduate Supervisor will ask students registered in the thesis course to report on their progress during the term. Annually, the Dean of Graduate Studies asks the School for a statement of progress.

Stage Two: Preparing For Examination

Almost inevitably, a thesis will take longer to write than you think.

It may be delayed by roadblocks in research, by essential sources who are on extended trips, by the Thesis Supervisor's own schedule, by delays in rewriting drafts of chapters or the entire thesis after the Thesis Supervisor has seen them, and by writer's block.

If you want to graduate in a timely fashion, the best advice we can offer is to settle on your topic early, consult your Thesis Supervisor frequently, and build time into your schedule to cope with potential delays.

I. Formatting your thesis document

The format in which the thesis is to be presented for examination and for deposit in the Library is regulated by the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs (FGPA), which has prepared material on the subject.

Check the latest version at <http://www5.carleton.ca/fgpa/thesis-requirements/>

Please note: the FGPA guidelines on such details as margins, the abstract, the title page, page numbering and so on **must be followed exactly**. The university does not accept theses that do not conform to these criteria.

II. Preparing for your examination

Once the thesis is completed to the satisfaction of the student and the Thesis Supervisor, there is a process that must be followed:

1. Three weeks before she/he intends to submit the examination copies, the candidate must do the following:
 - a. Inform the Thesis Supervisor and Graduate Supervisor of the date on which the thesis will be submitted;
 - b. Forward an electronic copy of the thesis abstract to the Thesis Supervisor and upload on Carleton Central a PDF exam thesis copy and fill out the required deposit forms for the Thesis Supervisor and the Journalism Program Head's approval.
 - c. FOUR unbound hard copies must be delivered to the Graduate Administrator – these copies do not need to be on special paper stock.
2. The Thesis Supervisor will forward the abstract to the Graduate Supervisor, along with the following information:
 - a. Suggested dates/times for an Examination Board;
 - b. Suggested names, titles and contact information for external examiners, along with a rationale for each. The Journalism Program Head will make the final selection of the External Examiner.
3. The Graduate Supervisor will then set up a formal examination. **There must be at least three weeks between submission of the examination copies and the scheduled examination board.**

The thesis is examined by a Board consisting of the Thesis Supervisor, the Internal Examiner, and External Examiner selected from another Department of the University (or occasionally from off-campus) by the Journalism Program Head.

Normally, the External Examiner is chosen because of expertise in the area. The Deans of the Faculty of Public Affairs and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (FGPA) are appointed ex officio to the Board, but do not attend.

At least one week before the scheduled examination date the External Examiner will indicate to the Graduate Supervisor whether she/he believes the thesis is ready for examination.

If the External Examiner does not believe it is ready for examination, the process stops at that point until the candidate does the necessary work to make it suitable for defence in the view of the External Examiner.

Stage Three: Thesis Examination

I. The process

The thesis examination board operates in a fairly standard way. Once introductions are made, the MJ candidate is asked to leave the room while the members of the examining committee to discuss the process and thesis grading approach. The candidate is then called back into the room.

Candidates normally make an opening statement in which they outline the purpose of the study, highlight its findings and importance of its conclusions, and bring to the board's attention any extenuating circumstances (such as difficulties in researching) that might be pertinent.

Questioning usually is in two rounds. First come the general questions relating to broad areas of argument and research methods/findings. A second round of questioning is designed to point out smaller points of interest or difficulty for the board.

Following an opportunity to make a closing statement, the candidate leaves while the board deliberates on the grade to be awarded.

II. Thesis grading

The Thesis Grade is graded overall as "Pass with Distinction," "Satisfactory," or "Unsatisfactory." The Oral Defence is graded as "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory."

The Examination Board may ask for corrections:

1. "Minor" corrections are usually brief passages to be rewritten or clarified;
2. "Major" corrections are larger segments that need to be rewritten, added or eliminated.

The Chair of Thesis Defence submits on Carleton Central the Thesis Exam Report (consists of grade and comments of Board).

The candidate must make all these corrections and they must be approved by the Board or by the Thesis Supervisor acting on the Board's behalf.

Please review the full FGPA Examination Policy document under "Theses and Dissertations" at <http://gradstudents.carleton.ca/thesis-requirements/>

III. Post-examination

Your grade cannot be recorded until you do the following:

1. Ensure your final thesis copy is approved by your Thesis Supervisor
2. UPLOAD your final thesis PDF copy on Carleton Central for Thesis Supervisor's approval to FGPA. See instructions <http://gradstudents.carleton.ca/thesis-requirements/electronic/>

MJ Thesis Submission Timetable

The following are dates set by the Dean of FGPA for completing certain administrative steps related to theses.

Please consult the current Graduate Calendar (“Academic Schedule”) to confirm precise dates.

TIMELINE	FOR FALL GRADUATION - November	FOR WINTER GRADUATION - February	FOR SPRING GRADUATION - June
Candidate notifies Graduate Supervisor of the date she/he intends to submit final copies of thesis. This can only be done with the approval of the Thesis Supervisor.	Notification must occur at least 14 days in advance of submission of examination copies. Graduate Supervisor then begins arranging the examination board.	Notification must occur at least 14 days in advance of submission of examination copies. Graduate Supervisor then begins arranging the examination board.	Notification must occur at least 14 days in advance of submission of examination copies. Graduate Supervisor then begins arranging the examination board.
Candidate then submits FOUR unbound paper examination thesis copies to Graduate Administrator, and uploads PDF copy on Carleton Central for approval. This must be done at least three weeks before an examination board can be held.	Submission must be made by August 1. An examination board cannot be held sooner than three weeks after submission. This allows time for board members to review the thesis.	Submission must be made by December 1. An examination board cannot be held sooner than three weeks after submission. This allows time for board members to review the thesis.	Submission must be made by March 1. An examination board cannot be held sooner than three weeks after submission. This allows time for board members to review the thesis.
Candidate must apply to graduate.	By September 1	By December 1	By February 1
If the thesis examination is successful, the candidate must UPLOAD a corrected copy of thesis in Carleton Central, as well as send a final PDF version to the Graduate Administrator and Thesis Supervisor.	By September 17	By January 17	By May 12
Candidate must register for thesis if final thesis is not deposited.	By September 17	By January 17	By May 12

