

Some Guidelines for Writing Your BA Thesis

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February 2010

Getting Started

- 1) Select the primary texts (literature) or cultural phenomenon that you want to focus on in your thesis.
- 2) Formulate a title for your project. To do so consider the following: What do you like best or what bothers you the most about the text or texts you have read and wish to work on? What makes you keep thinking about a given literary work or a cultural event such as 9/11? Put this into words. Try to narrow down your subject as much as possible. You do not, for instance, need to define Modernism or offer a history of this movement. Rather you might want to look at one feature of Virginia Woolf's prose, for instance, the use of pronouns in one work in order to say something specific about Modernism.
- 3) Now formulate a central thesis (argument) or a central question which you wish to work out in the course of your essay. Your thesis or essay question should inform the title of your BA thesis. An average reader should be able to understand what you plan to do in your thesis simply by reading its title.
- 4) Now that you have a title, write an abstract. This should consist of several sentences. It should include your thesis, three or more subsidiary points you wish to make, and your (probable) conclusion.
- 5) Find a theoretical framework. In a text of this length you will need to go beyond close reading strategies and summarizing discussions which are formulated in secondary work. Consider which theoretical framework (feminism, post-colonial theory, Law-and-Literature, critical media studies, etc) will help you best to make your argument.
- 6) Find a good secondary source with which to familiarize yourself with the theoretical framework best suited for your project. After deciding on who the main theorist or theorists are with whom you want to work, go to their original work and read it. Use a translation if necessary. You will be using your theoretical text/s just as much as your primary ones in your thesis.
- 7) Now write an outline consisting of your title and the titles of your essay's sub-sections. Try to make your structure as clear as possible. Your goal should be that anyone looking at your outline will immediately have a clear idea of what your thesis is about and what its central arguments are.

Structuring Your Thesis

- 8) Many students are worried about how to structure an essay of this length. If you are unsure about how to frame your argument and structure your essay you may want to proceed as follows:
- I) The first part of your thesis should consist of an introduction in which you state what you are aiming to do and how you are going to do it. This entails naming your central argument, the theoretical framework in which you are going to broach your argument, and any additional information that the reader needs to know straight off the bat. (You might wish to aim to make this section about five pages long.)
 - II) The second part of your thesis should outline the theoretical framework of your study in depth. Here, you should mention any existing controversies that may affect how you are analyzing your text. Describe how you agree or disagree with authorities and how their work affects what you are doing with your text/s. (You might wish to make this and the following section around twelve to thirteen pages long each.) Parts two and three can be divided into further subsections.
 - III) In the third part of your thesis you should perform close text analysis using the theory you have just described. The text, whether it be a novel, a TV series, or a historical event, is your evidence. In this section you will want to demonstrate to your reader that your argument is sound by backing it up with as much textual substantiation as possible.
 - IV) In your conclusion, you will summarize what you have done in the first three parts of your thesis. You should state clearly what the most important insights you made in your essay were. You should also aim to move beyond this summary. Consider what new insights have been gained on the basis of the totality of the work you have done. This is an opportunity for you to articulate what is important and new about the work you have accomplished.

General Points

- a) Make the structure of your essay as clear as possible. Leave as many signposts as possible for your reader about where you are headed in your writing.
- b) Try to enjoy writing your thesis. This is your work and your learning experience. Make the weeks working on this project happy ones.
- c) Leave enough time to go over your work as carefully and as critically as possible. If possible, finish writing your thesis well before the deadline so that you have time to put it aside and then go back to it with some critical distance.
- d) Let your friends proofread your work, and you should offer to proofread theirs. Being in dialogue about your writing will help you to move forward with the thesis as well as your ideas.
- e) Until the new departmental style sheet has been posted, please consult the notes on my website about writing papers in academic English.
- f) Kindly use parenthetical references.
- g) Do not summarize the plots of the texts you are working on. Kindly assume that your first reader is also familiar with your primary text or texts.