



Getting Started on Your Graduate Thesis

A-State Online Writing Center

What is a Graduate Thesis?

“A [graduate] thesis enables you an opportunity to develop (and prove that you have developed) a deeper knowledge and understanding of a particular area of study.” (“A Guide”). Writing a thesis for your graduate program not only enhances your understanding of whatever subject you have chosen to study but also amplifies your research skills and familiarizes you with important sources and connections to others in your field. Plus, if you ever decide that you want to pursue a doctorate, a thesis “serves as a preparatory stage” for your future dissertation (“A Guide”).

The Reality: Writing a Thesis is Hard Work

As exciting of an opportunity as writing a thesis is, it is no secret that it is a difficult task. If you are having trouble getting started with your thesis in any way, here are some tips to help you navigate through the beginning and brainstorming stages of its construction!

How to Get Started with Your Graduate Thesis:

1. Pick your thesis topic. The first step is always the hardest. However, you cannot have a thesis without a topic to write about! Do some research over what you think you want to focus on, then think more about what topic you want to write your thesis over. Even if all you have is a vague idea, take it and ruminate over it for a while, making sure you can at least explain it somewhat to one of your professors, which will help you greatly for step two below.
2. Pick a faculty advisor from your university program to be your thesis mentor. It is crucial to do this step first to have a trusted, educated individual to guide you along your journey of thesis writing. Be sure to explain your idea for your thesis, and they can help you expand upon it, narrow it down, or give it any of the accommodations it needs before you start to plan it out more thoroughly. This mentor that you pick will more than likely be the chair of your thesis committee (a.k.a., the group of professors to whom you will present your thesis defense whenever it is completed), so it is important that you choose them carefully. Ensure that you have a good rapport with them and that they have a vast amount of expertise to offer you as you construct your thesis.

3. Select your thesis committee. While you meet with your thesis mentor, talk with them about which other professors should sit in on your thesis defense upon the completion of your work. These should all be educators that have experience and expertise within the realm of your thesis topic and argument so that they can provide you with as much helpful feedback and advice as possible during your thesis defense.
4. Look at a recently published thesis from your university's library databases/archives. Before you begin writing your thesis, it is important to know how your thesis should look and/or be formatted. To gather this information, the best place for you to look would be in your university's library. There, you will find several theses, including ones from your area of study, both in print and online. Look at these to see how other students before you have formatted theirs. Also, your thesis mentor may have some print copies in his/her office for you to browse through to get an idea of how you want yours to look or be structured. A visual guide or two will really help you get an idea of how you want your own thesis to look!
5. Plan out the structure of your thesis. Next, you need to decide how your thesis needs to be structured, a.k.a. deciding and brainstorming out a table of contents for it. Usually, a thesis is made up of an "introduction, literary review, main body, conclusion, and bibliography," in that order ("What is a Thesis?"). However, be sure to consult your thesis mentor and look at those previous theses published at your university and get some ideas on how you should structure your own.
6. Start writing! After you put these crucial preliminary steps into play, you're ready to start drafting your sections of each of them in your own time and at your own pace. Remember to always reach out for help if you get stuck or discouraged! Writing a thesis is a very independent project, and it can be easy to get overwhelmed at times. There is no shame in asking for help or taking a break. You can do this!

Works Consulted:

“A Guide to Writing Your Master’s Dissertation” <https://www.oxbridgeessays.com/blog/guide-writing-masters-dissertation/>.

“What is a Thesis” <https://www.gradschoolhub.com/faqs/what-is-a-thesis/>.