

THESIS RESEARCH AND WRITING GUIDELINES
M.A. IN BIBLICAL STUDIES AND CHRISTIAN THOUGHT
TRINITY WESTERN UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

1. Students may be evaluated following the completion of coursework and prior to registration in Thesis I and Thesis II (RELS 691, 692). A minimum G.P.A. of 3.0 must be maintained in order for students to register for Thesis I and Thesis II.
2. Students in TWU's M.A. in Biblical Studies and Christian Thought take the initiative in choosing a Thesis Advisor and a Second Reader, in setting up advisory meetings, and in meeting the deadlines for submission of work. The following are some guidelines that will aid students in the timely and successful completion of the written thesis and its oral defense.

CHOOSING A THESIS ADVISOR

1. An opportunity will be given during Orientation and Research Design (RELS 690) for students to learn about the research interests of the various faculty members.
2. Students are encouraged to approach a prospective Thesis Advisor and Second Reader as early as possible in their program in order to discuss thesis ideas. Students normally submit the "Application for Thesis Advisor" (available on the MABSCT website) to the Program Director at the beginning of February prior to the academic year in which they register for Thesis I and Thesis II. While every effort is made to match students with their first choice of Thesis Advisor, the final decision is made by the Director in consultation with the student and faculty.
3. Once thesis work is underway, students may not change Thesis Advisor other than in exceptional circumstances and with permission of the Program Director. Additional fees may be assessed.
4. In the course of any working relationship, difficulties and misunderstandings may arise. Students and Thesis Advisors are encouraged to make every effort to keep communication open and to resolve any difficulties. If necessary, the Program Director may be called in to offer assistance.

THESIS PROPOSAL

1. Students normally prepare a preliminary Thesis Proposal as part of the Research Design course (RELS 690). Although students may take RELS 690 in the same academic year that they submit and defend a thesis, it is the norm for students to take Research Design in one year and to write and defend the thesis in the following year.
2. Students develop a Thesis Proposal in consultation with the Thesis Advisor. The Thesis Proposal includes a working title, a statement of the question to be explored, an outline, a suggested schedule of research and writing, and a preliminary bibliography.

3. The completed Thesis Proposal must receive the supporting signature of the Thesis Advisor before being submitted to the office of the Program Director for approval.

THE WRITING OF THE THESIS

1. Following acceptance of the Thesis Proposal, students should arrange to meet regularly with their chosen Thesis Advisor, ideally every two weeks during the research and writing stage.
2. Any written work must be submitted to the Thesis Advisor at least 5 days ahead of the scheduled meeting, in order to give the Advisor sufficient time to prepare a thoughtful response. If a chapter has not been completed, students are encouraged to submit even a few pages of writing or ideas. Important keys to success for most projects are regular meetings with the Thesis Advisor coupled with a steady progress of research and writing.
3. When appropriate, the Thesis Advisor, in consultation with the student, may call on the services of the Second Reader to review and respond to individual chapters.
4. A draft copy of the entire thesis is then submitted to the Thesis Advisor and to the Second Reader. The draft copy includes the introduction, all chapters, conclusions, table of contents, and bibliography. An abstract of no more than 350 words must also be included. The minimum length of the thesis is 20,000 – 25,000 words, approximately 90 pages. Any thesis project that exceeds this length by a large margin must be at the consent of both the student and the Thesis Advisor.
5. The thesis style, especially as it pertains to footnotes, abbreviations, and transliterations, should conform, unless otherwise agreed, to the style of the Society of Biblical Literature, using the *SBL Handbook of Style*, edited by Patrick Alexander and the *Little, Brown Compact Handbook*. Format, especially as to the layout of the various parts, headings, and quotations, should also conform to the guidelines of K. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* (6th ed.). Exceptions may be made by the agreement of the student and the Thesis Advisor.
6. The Thesis Advisor and Second Reader review the draft thesis and respond with comments. The student makes appropriate revisions.
7. Once both the Thesis Advisor and Second Reader agree that the thesis is ready to be examined, a date for the Oral Thesis Defense will be set by the office of the Program Director.
8. Six weeks prior to a scheduled thesis defense the Supervisory Committee Approval (SCA) form must be signed by the supervisory committee and submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies. Students must also submit a final, revised, electronic copy of their thesis and an abstract of no more than 150 words (shorter than the abstract previously included).
9. Digital or hard copies of the revised thesis must be submitted to the Program Director, the

Thesis Supervisor, and the Second Reader no less than 7-10 days prior to the scheduled Thesis Oral Defense. Either a digital copy or two hard copies must be made available for all MA Biblical Studies and Christian Thought Faculty to review. Please note: Students must pay careful attention to deadlines below. Failure to meet the deadlines may result in a delay in the oral defense and in the assessment of continuation fees.

10. In some cases, the thesis will be forwarded for assessment to an External Examiner, an expert in the field outside the University's faculty, who will be selected by the Program Director in consultation with the Thesis Advisor and student. All communication with an External Examiner must be done through the Thesis Coordinator in the Office of Graduate Studies.
11. An Examination Committee will be formed consisting of the Thesis Advisor and the Second Reader/External Examiner.

DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSION OF DRAFT THESIS AND FINAL THESIS

Students who are planning an Oral Defense must observe the following deadlines for submission of the draft copy and the final thesis.

Forms for Submission & Procedures	Timelines
<i>If required</i> - Nomination for External Examiner (Student driven form)	Due three months before proposed timeline for defense. Must be accompanied by the Abstract.doc. The abstract is sent to the nominees. Once an External Examiner is secured, a timeframe is provided for receipt of the thesis.
Supervisory Committee Approval (Student driven form)	Due a minimum of six weeks before anticipated defense date. Must be accompanied by the Thesis (pdf). At this point, the thesis is provided to the External Examiner for review.
<i>If required</i> - External Examiner Preliminary Evaluation (ORGS form)	The External Examiner is granted three weeks to submit a Preliminary Evaluation.
<i>If required</i> - External Examiner Report	The External Examiner is granted an additional week (equaling a total of four weeks) to submit a brief report. *There must be at least two weeks between receipt of the report and the date of defense.
Exam Chair (ORGS procedure)	Secured only if examination committee and defense date are set with an allowance of three weeks before the defense date.
Thesis Evaluation & Agreement (ORGS form)	Office of Research and Graduate Studies (ORGS) provides this form to the Exam Chair, for use at the defense. The Exam Chair returns the form to ORGS after the defense. ORGS uses this form to

	advise the Office of the Registrar of the student's grade, after all of the student's post-defense requirements are complete.
Final Thesis Approval (Student driven form)	Student submits form to ORGS, after revisions are complete and the examination committee approves the final draft. This form advises ORGS that the thesis is ready to be uploaded into TWUSpace.
Completion of all program requirements for participation in graduation ceremony (FALL = first week of November; SPRING = first week of April)	Due a minimum of five weeks prior to graduation date, as per the Office of the Registrar. See Completion Policy for requirements.
Completion of all program requirements for conferral date (December 31 or May 31)	Due two weeks prior to conferral date.

CONTINUOUS ENROLMENT, LEAVE OF ABSENCE, AND DISMISSAL

With the exception of parental leave and other certified medical leave, students must maintain continuous enrolment throughout the course of their graduate studies. Students must register a Leave of Absence with the Program Director and the Office of Graduate Studies. When a leave of absence is required for parental leave and other certified medical leave the student must obtain the Program Director's signature on a registration form and submit this form to the Office of Graduate Studies within the first 2 weeks of a semester.

The student who does not complete a thesis within 5 years of the first full graduate year will be dismissed from the program. Only under exceptional extenuating circumstances, and with the agreement of both the Thesis Advisor and Program Director, will there be any extension beyond this limit.

REGISTRATION FOR CONTINUATION STATUS AND PAYMENT OF FEES

The student is responsible to register for Continuation Status and pay a Continuation Status fee by the end of the first week of each term (e.g., September, January and May/July) when (1) the student is not registered for any course; and (2) when the student has not completed the thesis/project requirements in the allotted time-frame (e.g., after 2 consecutive terms, including summer). Continuation fees are charged until the student has completed all requirements. In the case of Thesis, this means that the electronic copy of the completed thesis has been submitted to the appropriate location following the oral defense or the student has formally withdrawn from the program. Students are entitled to a prorated refund of a portion of the Continuation Fees paid if all requirements are completed prior to the end of the sixth week of the semester.

ORAL THESIS DEFENSE

1. The Chair (normally a faculty member from a TWU graduate program other than MABSCT) of the Examination Committee will convene the meeting and distribute to each member of the Examination Committee a Thesis Evaluation Form as well as a copy of the Examination

Programme (prepared by the Program Director's office and submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies). The Programme will include:

- the name of the candidate
 - names of all committee members
 - thesis title
 - an abstract (not to exceed 350 words)
2. The student is then introduced by the Chair and will proceed with a 15 to 20 minute presentation of the thesis. Students are welcome to use handouts or visual aids, such as overheads or PowerPoint slides.
 3. Students should be prepared to answer any questions from the Examination Committee. Typically, there are two rounds of questioning begun by the Second Reader/External Examiner and followed by the Thesis Advisor. The next round of questions is open to members of the MABSCT Faculty and, finally, to the audience. The time allotted for thesis defense is to be no more than 2 hours. The Chair should ensure that: 1) no examiner should take more than one half hour for each round; 2) that no examiner will pursue relentlessly a single line of questioning when it is obvious that the candidate does have a satisfactory answer.
 4. At the Masters level, students are not expected to be an authority on the thesis topic as in the case of a Ph.D. oral defense. Students should feel free to admit that they do not know the answer and they can either ask for explanation from the questioner or promise to do further research on the question.
 5. After the Oral Examination, everyone except the Examination Committee and Exam Chair will be asked to leave the room so that the Examination Committee may evaluate the written thesis and oral defense and discuss the grade and any necessary corrections or revisions. The student is then invited back into the room for a discussion of the results.

THESIS EVALUATION

The following is used by the Examination Committee in its assessment of the thesis:

THE EXAMINATION COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING:

- ___ 1) The thesis merits the award of the degree and is acceptable as is.
- ___ 2) The thesis merits the award of the degree subject to minor corrections made to the satisfaction of the Thesis Advisor.
- ___ 3) The thesis merits the award of the degree subject to substantial minor corrections made to the satisfaction of the Thesis Advisor and the Second Reader.
- ___ 4) The thesis merits the award of the degree, subject to major revisions, made to the satisfaction of the Examination Committee.

____5) The thesis, in its present form, does not merit award of the degree and further research is required. The revised thesis should be resubmitted to the Examination Committee and another Thesis Defense Meeting will be scheduled.

____6) The thesis does not merit the award of the degree and is not of sufficient merit to warrant re-submission after further work.

THE EXAMINATION COMMITTEE ASSIGNS THE FOLLOWING OVERALL THESIS GRADE

- A+ (90-100%) Exceptional – Recommended for doctoral studies
 A (85-89%) Very Good/Excellent – Recommended for doctoral studies
 A- (80-84%) Good – minimum required to be recommended for doctoral studies
 B+ (77-79%) Satisfactory – typically not recommended for doctoral studies
 B (73-76%) Passing – not recommended for doctoral studies
 Defer (i.e., Category 5)
 Fail (i.e., Category 6)

GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION OF M.A. IN BIBLICAL STUDIES THESES	Comments/ Notes
1. Primary Literature: The student demonstrates appropriate and commendable engagement with the pertinent primary texts and original languages.	
2. Secondary Literature: The student demonstrates appropriate and commendable engagement with pertinent secondary literature.	
3. Methodology: The student indicates familiarity with a range of methods, provides suitable reasons for adopting the particular method(s) used in the thesis, and employs the method(s) in a consistent and commendable manner throughout the thesis.	
4. Argument: The student offers a coherent, consistent and generally persuasive argument throughout the thesis, with a breadth and depth appropriate to the subject matter under consideration.	
5. Originality/contribution: In its conceptualization and execution, the thesis demonstrates a commendable degree of originality and makes a contribution to biblical studies – for example, in its aims, approaches, insights, outcome, and implications.	
6. Standard of writing: The thesis is written in a clear, coherent and cogent manner, at a standard expected of a graduate (masters) student. It is appropriately formatted and substantially free from stylistic errors, following the <i>SBL Handbook of Style</i> and the <i>Little, Brown Compact Handbook</i> . Format, especially as to the layout of the various parts, headings, and quotations, should conform unless otherwise agreed to the guidelines of K. Turabian, <i>A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations</i> (6th ed.) The submitted document has addressed all changes required by the Thesis Advisor and Second Reader.	

7. Oral exam performance: The oral summary of the thesis is concise, clear and cogent. The same should be true concerning the responses to questions from the examiners, which also demonstrate mastery of the thesis material and a commendable understanding of pertinent broader areas of Biblical Studies.	
8. Independence of work: The student has been the primary contributor to all stages of the thesis process: its conceptualization, research, and writing. This standard must be met in order for an A or an A+ to be awarded to the thesis.	
Optional Elements: certain considerations may factor in elevating a borderline grade: for example, timely completion, identification of further research suggested by the thesis, use of appropriate secondary literature in languages other than English, and papers read at conferences.	
OVERALL THESIS GRADE	

Note. This is not a calculation sheet, but a set of guidelines, and its elements may be weighed somewhat differently depending upon the thesis, at the discretion of the examination committee members.

POST-THESIS RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Once the Thesis Oral Defense date is set, the student contacts the Office of the School of Graduate Studies for a checklist of post-thesis defense responsibilities which outlines all matters pertaining to the submission of electronic copies of the thesis.
2. The successful candidate will submit an electronic copy of their revised thesis and completed forms to the office of the School of Graduate Studies. A copy of the thesis will be archived by the University.

GRADUATION: “Full Graduate” and “Participating Graduate Status”

In order to participate in the Fall graduation ceremonies with Full Graduate status, the student must ensure that all requirements for graduation are met, that coursework is completed, that grades are on record for coursework done, and that copies of the thesis are submitted no less five weeks prior to the anticipated graduation ceremony.

Revised November 21, 2019.