

**WOU GRADUATE THESIS
MANUAL (DRAFT)**

INTRODUCTION

The faculty of WOU's Graduate Programs is here to work with you and provide you with a quality master's degree experience. The *WOU Graduate Thesis Manual* is designed to provide all instructions, guidelines and regulations required to complete a Master's thesis. This new edition replaces all guides and templates previously released by the Graduate Office.

An important purpose of a final thesis or professional project is to introduce you to original research under the supervision of a graduate faculty member. The primary value of a final thesis is that instead of studying a series of minor and highly-specified topics, you are obligated to examine a sizeable topic for a greater period of time while clearly learning to define both the very nature of a question and its relevant research findings. By the time a final thesis is completed, you can claim to have mastered a specific aspect of knowledge and accrued a deeper awareness concerning the processes of research.

In particular, you will gain experience:

- formulating a research question;
- making critical use of published work;
- selecting and using appropriate research methods; and
- organizing and presenting material in a clear, logical and convincing way.

All students preparing a thesis must conform to the rules explained in this manual for forming a committee, actualizing academic integrity, following the IRB regulations, observing format and arrangement of contents, placement, submission, and obtaining approval for thesis documents.

The Graduate Office urges students and their committee members to *follow this manual throughout the thesis process*. Doing so will save everyone time and effort. If in doubt about processes involved in this manual, consult your thesis Chair or the Graduate Office.

Do NOT submit a thesis until you read this manual thoroughly!

You must use the formatting guidelines in this manual for page numbers, headings, margins, and copyright protection.

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General Information

Prerequisites¹

Each department is different. Before beginning any thesis work, it is crucial to consult an advisor or program director regarding the following questions:

Should I write a thesis?

Theses are not a required exit option for all graduate students. It is an incredibly rewarding process, but should this option be selected, preparation is needed.

What are the timeline and the major deadlines of a thesis?

Recognize that selecting a committee, submitting Research Proposals, and the IRB (Institutional Review Board) applications all have deadlines. Familiarize yourself with these due dates at least one quarter beforehand, if not sooner.

It is necessary to keep in mind specific deadlines concerning your thesis. An accurate yearly calendar containing important dates of each term is available on the Graduate Programs website at:

http://www.wou.edu/provost/graduate/important_dates.php

What are the rules in my concentration?

Learn the citation and style guidelines for academic writing which pertains to your field. APA is generally the approved, but verify with your committee Chair. Throughout your thesis one style guideline must be used consistently.

What are the limits of my topic?

Determine whether your research will be limited by the IRB, such as: *Section 1.4*, geography, sample size or other practicalities. Not all ideas for theses are workable, especially if there are pressing deadlines. It is best to discuss your research questions and protocol with your research advisor (committee chair) as soon as possible in the process, but at least one quarter before you anticipate applying for graduation.

Who will be available to direct and assist me concerning my thesis?

Your committee members will be your best resources in the thesis process; choose wisely. (*Section 1.5*)

Thesis Timeline

A thesis may be an intimidating and challenging process. Your final thesis represents the culmination and significant devotion to research in your field, which could not be accomplished in only a few weeks. It is critical to realize that your work bears equal importance to your field as any published article in a

¹ University, Western Carolina. "WCU Graduate Thesis Guide 7th Edition." Cullowhee, NC, October 2010.

recognized professional journal. Generally, the planning of your thesis should begin during your first term of your final year as a graduate student.

Table A: Sample One-Year Thesis Timeline (Fall Term Start)

Task	Time Frame
Choose a research topic, need, or issue.	Early in fall term
Find a chair that is interested in your topic, need, or issue	Early in fall term
Develop your thesis proposal, select a writing committee, and seek IRB approval if needed (submit pre-approval to Graduate Office)	October - November
Write the literature review and method chapters	December - January
Collect data	February - March
Analyze data	March
Complete writing and prepare for oral defense	April - May
Complete oral defense of paper	May

Note: The sample table above assumes that a student is a full-time student who wishes to complete their thesis beginning in the Fall Term. Each master's candidate should develop a similar chart with the assistance of his or her committee chair. **Most candidates should expect to take one year to complete their final thesis.**

Important Steps

Complete the following steps as your thesis research develops:

IRB Approval Form: (if human subjects are used in research)

Preapproval Form: both your thesis topic and committee forms are **due the first week of the term you intend to graduate.**

Application for Completion of a Master's Degree: application is **due the first week, two terms before graduation.**

Thesis Copies: All thesis copies of thesis need to be received by the Graduate Office **no later than Wednesday during finals week of the term you plan to graduate.** It is essential that the Evaluation Page be signed by all members of your committee.

Individual term credits (ED603, CJ 603) deadlines will be established by the faculty member overseeing the project as well as your graduate advisor.

Selecting your Topic

Selecting a topic for a suitable thesis proposal is the first and most significant step of your thesis. Considering you are about to invest several months (and possibly years) on your thesis, selecting an

appropriate topic of interest may feel intimidating. Keep the following recommendations² in mind when deciding on a topic:

- **Choose a topic you are passionate about.** This may be the most important criteria. You will be spending considerable time with this project; your quality of life will be more satisfying if these hours are spent enjoyably. What's more, the quality of your research, writing, and arguments will be more dynamic by feeling genuine passion for your work. Choose a topic you find both fascinating and socially significant in your field.
- **Pick a topic that will be helpful in your career path.** If your goal is an academic career, choose a topic that can be easily modified into journal articles or a book lending itself well to future research. If you wish to work at a teaching-oriented institution, consider a topic you can use in the classroom. If you are going into industry, select a topic that will make you more marketable. Ask yourself this, "How will my topic sound when I discuss it at a future career interview?"
- **Find a topic that establishes a niche in your field.** Do your research and find a topic that fits into existing bodies of literature, *yet builds upon theory and expands it.*
- **Choose research that is unique.** Complete significant research to make sure this topic has not been examined before. Be creative and choose an idea that is original and innovative.
- **Think carefully before you choose a controversial topic.** This does not mean you should avoid areas that spark your interest. However, if you choose a controversial topic, think carefully about how it may impact future employment, tenure, or publishing opportunities.
- **Pick a topic about which you already have some expertise.** Previously acquired knowledge will provide a foundation for your thesis giving you an advantage concerning your research. Taking related knowledge from your coursework and writing assignments that will reflect and contribute to your thesis.
- **Pick a manageable topic.** This is a huge project that requires ample devotion, but it is not your life's research. A good advisor will help you narrow and refine your topic and encourage realistic timelines during your graduate career.

Consultation and approval of a topic with a faculty member who is willing to act as your chair is required before moving forward. If you are not ready to make a definite thesis proposal, decide on a general area of interest in which you would like to pursue research. Within this area of interest, seek out pertinent professional and academic journals which provide direction towards a particular subject. Articles often contain and reflect current major research interests and often specify issues which further a desirable new study.³ See *Appendix B* for some key caveats and examples from Harvard University in thesis development.

Characteristics of a Quality Topic

Need for research: A significant necessity for research should exist. The results need not have immediate application, but your topic should not be trivial. You must believe that your research is important and worthwhile, thereby helping to retain motivation during periods of routine work. Keep in mind that the need to understand the nature of some specific phenomenon is the key motivation for most research.

² Gladen, Naomi. "Dissertation and Thesis Topics: How to Choose Successful Research for your PhD or Master's Degree," Campus Life Suite101.com, March 2007.

³ Northeastern Illinois University. "Graduate College Thesis Manual." Chicago, IL. September 2010.

Amenable to research methods: Your topic needs to be feasible. It is important to consider both the availability of data and the availability of tools for analysis. Take into account that some research projects and research methods are beyond the capabilities of students because of technology, cost, or length of time requirements.

Achievable in a reasonable time: Typically, a master's final thesis should have the potential of being completed in one year by full-time graduate students. **A final thesis should be in the range of 20,000 - 40,000 words; or between 80 and 120 double-spaced pages;** although the nature of your topic may require you to exceed these typical ranges.

Match with student's capabilities and interests: The research topic should match both your interests and capabilities. This will sustain you in times of frustration and offset the possibility of entering areas where you have insufficient expertise.

Contribution of knowledge: A master's thesis should be based on a significant issue or research question. For example, you may want to replicate an experiment or study by using improved data and/or techniques in order to expand upon prior research. Acknowledge that your work should relate to, explain, solve, or add proof to the topic's question or issue. The outcome of the results from your research should increase understanding applicable to your particular field of inquiry. Knowledge can be increased by:

- New or improved evidence;
- New or improved methodology;
- New or improved technology/materials;
- New or improved concepts of theories; or
- Any combination of the above.

Institutional Review Board

What is the IRB?

The purpose of IRB oversight of research is to assure the protection of the research participants, the researcher, and the university. The research community has a responsibility to ensure that the treatment of human participants in research meets the highest ethical standard.

If you are conducting research involving humans or any other live vertebrates, you **must obtain IRB approval before your Research Proposal can be approved and prior to beginning your research.** *The process to obtain IRB approval has several components, including obtaining a NIH (National Institute of Health Protection of Human Subjects) Training Certification prior to submitting your IRB application.* Information may be obtained by consulting your chair, or by using the following link:

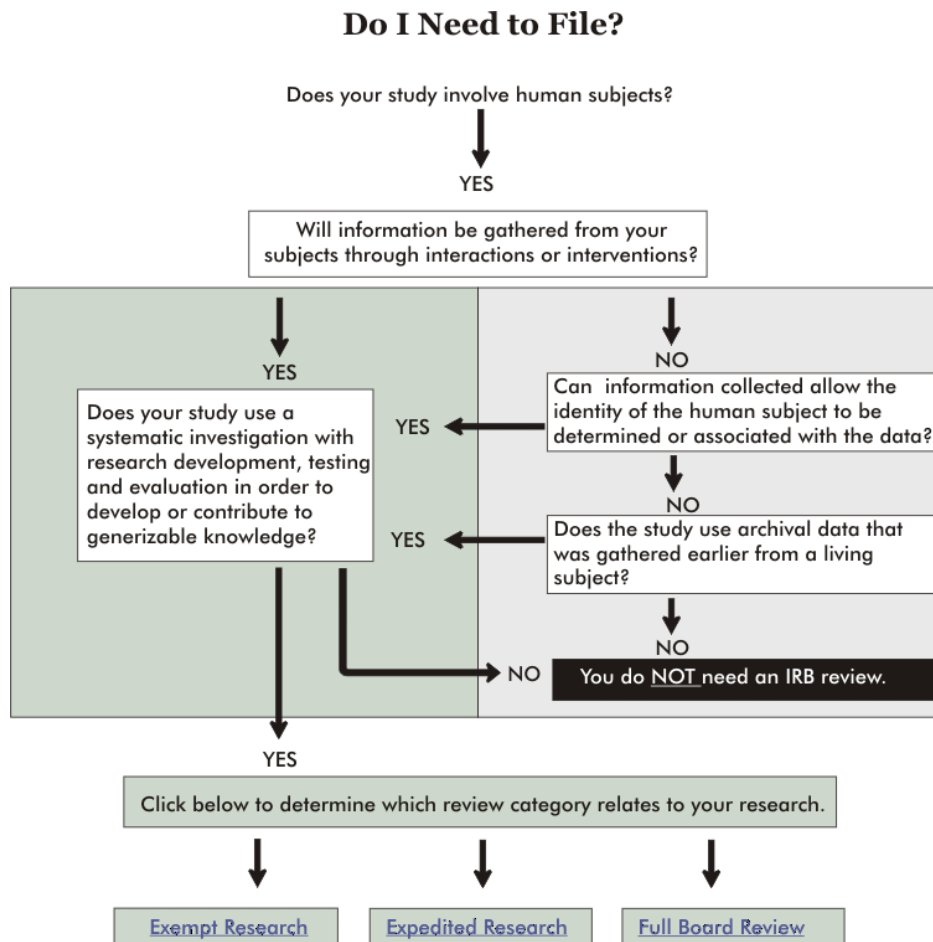
<http://www.wou.edu/provost/irb>

Why complete an IRB application and review?

If the proposed research activity involves human participants and may contribute (e.g. through publication, presentation, or dissemination outside the WOU community) to “general knowledge”, then the activity will require review and approval by the WOU Institutional Review Board before any recruitment or research involving human participants may begin. **IRB review and approval is required for ALL research projects involving human participants, regardless of the source of funding for the project or the level of risk posed to participants.**

Do I need to File?

There are three types of IRB review categories: **Exempt**, **Expedited**, and **Full Board**, shown in the following chart. Exempt and Expedited applications are reviewed by two IRB members. Research involving special participant populations (i.e. pregnant women, children, incarcerated individuals, etc.) requires Full Board review.



Once your research category is established, read the corresponding Level of Research Review document found on the website: http://www.wou.edu/provost/irb/level_review.php to determine if participant consent is required.

How Do I Get Help with Research Consent Forms?

Depending on your research review category, you may be required to include consent forms for your research sample's participation. It is required to obtain legally effective informed consent of individuals before research as a protection provided under the HHS regulations at 45 CFR part 46. Your thesis Chair or committee members can help determine the correct format concerning your area of research.

What is required to do an IRB application?

Effective February 1, 2010, NIH Training has become a mandatory component to the IRB review process. Below is the memo from the Provost regarding the importance of NIH Training and Certification:

Institutional Review Board NIH Training

The Western Oregon University research community has the responsibility to ensure that the treatment of human participants meets the highest ethical standard, as well as complies with the many federal regulations related to the protection of human subjects. The WOU Institutional Review Board (IRB) provides oversight review and approval for research conducted by the university's students, faculty and staff to assure the protection of the participants, the researcher, and the university. In addition, as a recipient of federal research funding, the university is required to assure and provide for the protection of all participants in the university's research endeavors. Failure to do so could lead to the loss of federal funding and increased liability.

As part of our commitment to human protections, we recently signed a new Federal-Wide Assurance with the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP), the Federal agency with oversight in this area. This assurance is a contract specifying our agreement to uphold ethical principles of research and comply with Federal regulations and guidelines for human subjects' research.

One of the requirements of our assurance involves certification of ongoing training of ethical principles and federal requirements regarding human subjects' research. In line with this requirement, the National Institute of Health, the National Science Foundation, and other federal entities require funding recipients to certify training in the ethical use of humans in research. To remain in compliance and assure that research conducted through Western Oregon University meets the highest ethical standard, the WOU Institutional Review Board requires education in the protection of human research participants for all individuals conducting human subjects' research.

WOU researchers must provide evidence of successful completion of the National Institute of Health (NIH) course Protecting Human Research Participants. This course may be accessed through the following link:

<http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>

Once completed, researchers will need to save their certificates electronically, or print them out and forward them to the Chair of the IRB. Approval of research projects will not be issued until documentation of training has been received by the IRB for all study team members. This documentation need only be submitted once. Study team members for whom the IRB has already received training certification will not be required to provide additional documentation of training.

How does an IRB Application get reviewed?

Upon submitting your IRB application, compare it to the most current IRB Initial Review Form (See *Appendix D*) to verify your application fulfills all areas of the initial review. This form is used by the IRB to evaluate your research project and contains the approval criteria.

What if Research Continues after One Year?

In 2010, the WOU Institutional Review Board revised the *Renewal/Continuing Review Policy* for research lasting more than one-year to be in compliance with the Office of Human Research and Protection. **If the scope of your research continues past one year of your IRB approval, it is your responsibility to submit renewal documents to the IRB.** To allow adequate time for review, renewal documents should be submitted no more than one month prior to the renewal date. Renewal documents for continuing approval can be found on the IRB website.

Contacting the IRB

It may be necessary to contact the IRB for full board meeting dates/deadlines or any questions you may have regarding your IRB application process. The IRB is there to assist you, feel free to call the office at 503.838.9200 or send an email to irb@wou.edu. If your research requires IRB approval, please refer to *Appendix D* of this manual for Frequently Asked Questions.

The members of the IRB represent the College of Education, the College of Liberal Arts, and the Teaching Research Institute.

Your Committee

It is your responsibility to select committee members that will be influential towards your thesis and with whom you wish to work closely. The committee must include a Chair, and two additional members with expertise in the area of your thesis work. The Chair and at least one additional member must be Western Oregon University faculty members. The third committee member can be an outside member of the university who holds at least an accredited master's degree. Choose committee members that will be available for advice and signatures throughout your thesis process. Be sure to *plan ahead*; you never know when you will need advice or a signature in order to move forward.⁴

The role of your Committee Chair: Your Committee Chair serves as the chief advisor concerning the development of your research and thesis. Regular contact with your Chair is necessary. Choose a Chair who will be accessible to you throughout the entire thesis process. The chair will help during the selection of your topic, your writing, your defense and printing. Your Chair's principal role is to offer you guidance on methodological and theoretical issues, as well as discussing issues that may arise during the thesis process.

The role of the thesis writing committee: With the assistance of your chair, you will select two additional members to serve on your thesis writing committee. All committee members should have expertise enabling them to provide critical and helpful advice in your thesis area and be willing to read and evaluate your thesis before your oral defense⁵. As a whole, the committee is in place to serve your needs. Upon submission of the Pre-Approval Form (see *Appendix C*) the Director of Graduate Programs

⁴ University, Western Carolina. "WCU Graduate Thesis Guide 7th Edition." Cullowhee, NC, October 2010.

⁵ University of California San Francisco. "Thesis Committee Formation and Meetings."

will approve your committee and your topic. The committee will review your proposal, provide you with additional research support, and serve as your oral defense committee. All three committee members must sign the Master's Degree Final Evaluation Report after you have successfully completed the oral defense of your paper.

One committee member may be a professor or professional (with a minimum of a Master's degree) from outside Western Oregon University, with the permission of your committee chair.

Plagiarism & Copyright Restrictions

Plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.⁶ All theses, or any paper developed by a graduate student must comply with university regulations (574-031-0300) concerning fabrication, facilitating dishonesty, and plagiarism. Material developed by someone other than the author of a thesis, or class paper should be clearly credited. Western Oregon University's Code of Student Responsibility (rev. 9/1/09) defines academic dishonesty as follows:

Academic Dishonesty, which includes but is not limited to:

- a) Cheating -- intentional use, or attempted use of artifice, deception, fraud, and/or misrepresentation of one's academic work;
- b) Fabrication -- unauthorized falsification and/or invention of any information or citation in any academic exercise;
- c) Facilitating dishonesty -- helping or attempting to help another person commit an act of academic dishonesty. This includes students who substitute for other persons in examinations or represent as their own papers, reports, or any other academic work of others;
- d) Plagiarism -- representing without giving credit the words, data, or ideas of another person as one's own work in any academic exercise. This includes submitting, in whole or in part, prewritten term papers of another or the research of another, including but not limited to the product of commercial vendors who sell or distribute such materials, and the appropriation and/or use of electronic data of another person or persons as one's own, or using such data without giving proper credit for it; or
- e) Any use or attempted use of electronic devices in gaining an illegal advantage in academic work in which the use of these devices is prohibited, and such devices include but are not limited to cell phones, PDAs, laptops, programmable calculators, removable disk drives, etc.⁷.

Internet material must be treated as published material and must be fully credited. Purchased research materials must also be clearly identified as the work of others and not the original work of the author. In situations where material was developed through study groups or other formal or informal group interaction, the author is obligated to credit others for the ideas that were developed as part of a group process.

A professor who believes that some form of dishonesty has occurred may take the following course of action:

⁶Council of Writing Program Administrators. "Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices." <http://www.wpacouncil.org/node/9>

⁷Western Oregon University. "Code of Student Responsibility." Monmouth, OR. September 2009.

- a) The faculty member may resolve the situation directly with the student or involve the Division Chair in resolution of the issue. The decision will be put in writing accurately stating the issue and how it was resolved. The student should be informed that if he/she disagrees with the decision, he/she has the right of appeal to the appropriate Dean.
- b) If the student chooses to appeal, the written appeal must be submitted to the appropriate Dean within five business days of receiving the decision. The Dean will review the appeal and respond in writing to both the student and faculty member within ten business days of receiving the appeal.
- c) In addition to the academic sanction, the faculty member may choose to bring a formal complaint of academic dishonesty to the Coordinator of Campus Judicial Affairs. The faculty member must submit the complaint in writing outlining specific details of the alleged misconduct. NOTE: This process is not required if the faculty member decides the issue has been dealt with appropriately at his/her level.

If the student has evidence that an error was made in the process, the student may pursue the issue through the student grievance process. Information regarding the student grievance process can be obtained from the Vice President for Student Affairs. A single instance of cheating or plagiarism is usually punished with a failing grade on the assignment in question. In situations where there is evidence of repeated offenses, or an offense involving an assignment comprising the greater part of the total grade (such as a term paper, thesis or professional project), this could entail a failing grade for the course (Faculty Handbook, General Academic Standards) and may lead to disciplinary action through WOU's Student Judicial System. A continuing pattern of failure to maintain a high level of academic honesty can lead to dismissal from Western Oregon University. All students should be familiar with the Code of Student Responsibility. Copies of the code (rev. 9/1/09) are available from the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and can be found at: <http://www.wou.edu/student/organization.php>

Copyright Restrictions

The U.S. Copyright Law provides federal copyright protection for both published and unpublished works. Therefore, authors who may wish to include quotations, illustrations, charts, graphs, and musical arrangements and so forth in their thesis should make every effort to be sure that reproduction of the copyrighted material does not exceed the doctrine of "Fair Use." Unpublished works, as well as works published without valid copyright notice are eligible for protection. Acknowledge that absence of a copyright symbol (©) does not necessarily mean that a work is in the public domain. Tabular arrangements and compilations are specifically covered under copyright law. Permission to reprint or adapt charts, tables, graphs, tabular arrangements, musical arrangements and so forth must be sought from the copyright holder.

Fair Use

If a work is protected by copyright, permission must be acquired prior to incorporation of that work into a new document. Extracts and quotations may be used to a limited extent for purposes of illustration and criticism. The language of the copyright law is vague as to what constitutes fair use, so the best rule is when in doubt, seek permission and consult with the editor of the particular work.

Securing Permission

Efforts to obtain permission to use material from other sources should begin well in advance of a final draft. If you use material that falls in these confines, you are expected to acquire written permission to use the material and the evidence of such permission must be provided with the final copy of the thesis/professional project. A statement of permission must appear in a caption or another distinct location in your thesis. The owner of the copyright may request that specific words or phrases be used to indicate that permission was granted. Requests for permission should be directed to the copyright holder or the copyright permissions editor of the publication. When requesting permission to reproduce copyrighted material, be sure to specify that the request is for a one-time, non-profit, educational use.

The Research Proposal

It is crucial that the research proposal be clear, concise and well-planned, avoiding misdirection. Your research proposal is the foundation of your entire thesis; the more thorough your planning is, the fewer roadblocks there will be in your thesis process. Possibly as much as 50 percent of the total time you spend on your final thesis will be taken up by planning.

Preparing your research proposal should be subjected to constant revision as a result of constructive comment and criticism by your Chair and committee members. Actively seek expert opinion on your proposal; it is far better to develop a viable research project at the outset than commence with a research project that proves to be unrealistic after all your time and effort has been put into it. You should continue with your literature study, discussions with experts and/or exploratory work until you are absolutely confident about your research problem. Your proposal should constitute a clear, crisp definition of your research, including your purpose of study, main objectives, and potential limitations.

The research proposal should contain a brief, precise statement of exactly what you want to do and how you propose to do it. Keep in mind that the proposal should be approximately 2-4 pages in length. Do not expect your writing Committee Chair and other advisers to consult any other document to obtain a clear idea of your research project.

As you begin writing your proposal, ask yourself the following questions:

- How can I develop a thesis which shows imagination and intellectual craftsmanship?
- How do I state the problem clearly?
- Can I write hypotheses or research questions that are clear, unambiguous and can be explored?
- If I do not need hypotheses, are my objectives clearly stated; can they be accomplished?
- How will I analyze the data or show that my project accomplishes the goals I set?
- If I need a sample population, is the population from which the sample is to be drawn receptive to the research and easily available to me?
- Is my thesis trying to do too much? If it is, what would make it more manageable?

Requirements

A research proposal provides your writing committee a clear idea of what you intend to do. You need to demonstrate to your committee the significance your topic and the need to investigate this area. Depending on the type of research design and methodology you select, you may need to define your research population and the type of statistics you intend use.

Your proposal should be a compelling and concise statement of your intended project or thesis issue's research. It should follow appropriate publication style and documentation rules (APA, MLA, etc-See Appendix A) with no grammatical errors. Limit your proposal to 2-4 pages, *not including* the list of references⁸.

The outline model below is only suggested; your writing Committee Chair will help you decide the best way to present your ideas.

- a) **Introduction** (3-4 paragraphs)
 - a. A brief introduction to the research project is provided leading up to a brief statement of the problem, or question. Often the candidate will include how he/she became interested in the research topic. This should not be more than three or four paragraphs.
- b) **Prior research**
 - a. This summary should be pertinent to the current problem, or question and not merely an undirected literature summary. What is known about the research question from prior literature? What is not known and why? You should reference at least 5-10 articles/books in this initial summary.
- c) **What do you plan to do?** (one page)
- d) **How will you measure your results or what product will you produce?** (2-5 paragraphs)
- e) **Contribution to knowledge** (2-3 paragraphs)
 - a. State the way(s) in which your work will make a contribution to knowledge. How is the proposed study unique? In what way will it go beyond existing research? How will it advance knowledge, contribute to the literature, or improve your profession?

Approval

Your Chair will assist you in developing a proposal for your committee. **Your proposal must be approved by your committee, and if necessary, approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before you submit your Pre-Approval Form and begin to collect data.** Effective June 15, 2003 both an approved proposal and evidence of IRB approval must be attached to your Pre-Approval Form (see *Appendix C*).

⁸ University, Western Carolina. "WCU Graduate Thesis Guide 7th Edition." Cullowhee, NC, October 2010.

Preparing the Thesis

A thesis is generally defined as:

. . . the written product of a systematic study of a significant problem. It identifies the problem, states the major assumptions, explains the significance of the undertaking, sets forth the sources for and methods of gathering information, analyzes the data, and offers a conclusion or recommendation. The finished project (product) evidences originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, and thorough documentation⁹.

While the statement above underscores the technical aspects of a thesis, sometimes there is a fine line between a thesis and professional project. A thesis is distinguished by certain elements such as an introduction to the study, a review of the literature, a methodology section, results, summary, and recommendations for further research; while a professional project may lack some of these components. The thesis attempts to answer a general question or questions that are of interest to an entire field or profession.

In general, *the introduction* should contain one or more hypotheses which establish the purpose(s) of the study and demonstrate the theoretical/organizational basis for the direction of study. *The literature review* should provide empirical evidence supporting the study and put the study in context with other research in the field. *The methodology section* explicitly describes how the research was conducted and any methods or implementations used, including any statistical treatment. *The results section* provides a thorough presentation and discussion of the findings. *The summary section* focuses on conclusions and recommendations for future research. *Appendices* which include data, maps, and other material too detailed or bulky for inclusion in the body of the text, may be appended at the end.

Note that there is a distinction between a quantitative thesis (which usually involves the collection and statistical analyses of numerical data) and a qualitative thesis (which involves non-statistical applications, i.e. case studies, interviews, etc). Thus, some portions of the thesis outlined in Section 3.1 may not apply to all theses. It is important to discuss with your committee and committee Chair the most suitable outline for your thesis content.

Thesis Content (Body of Text)

The framework of the thesis is built around the content areas noted in the previous section (Introduction, Lit. Review, etc). Organizing the research material in an outline based on this format will help you to clarify thoughts and present information in a logical sequence. The following outline is offered as a general template for the presentation of your thesis:

- a) Chapter 1: Introduction to the study:
 - a. background
 - b. statement of the problem
 - c. purpose of the study
 - d. theoretical bases and organization

⁹ The California Code of Regulations: Title 5 Education, Section 40510

- e. limitations of the study
- f. definition of terms
- b) Chapter 2: Review of the literature
- c) Chapter 3: Methodology
 - a. design of the investigation
 - b. population and/or sample
 - c. treatment
 - d. data analysis procedures
- d) Chapter 4: Results and discussion
 - a. presentation of the findings
 - b. discussion of the findings
- e) Chapter 5: Summary, conclusions, and recommendations
- f) References

Introduction to the study

The primary function of the Introduction is to provide an overview of the study. The following components should be included in the Introduction:

Background: The beginning of the chapter should serve as a carefully organized lead-in to the problem under investigation. This section should include an overview of the historical evolution, the current status, the projected future dimensions of the problem, or all three of these elements.

Statement of the Problem: Present the focal point(s) of the research. Introduce the "what" of the present investigation (i.e., clearly state what the study will examine or investigate). State the specific major question(s) and/or hypothesis(es) to be studied or tested. Make a precise statement of all minor questions to be explored.

Purpose of the Study: Justify the study. Why is the present investigation significant? Explain how it supports other studies, differs from previous studies, extends present knowledge and/or examines new issues.

Theoretical Bases and Organization: How does the present research correspond with other studies? What are the underlying theoretical bases upon which the study is constructed? One or more hypotheses should create the solid foundation upon which the conceptual framework is built.

Limitations of the Study: Discuss both content and methodological limitations of the investigation. How will the research work within or around these confines?

Definition of Terms: Define any special terms used in the study and establish abbreviations that will be used throughout the text. **If special terms are used, you must include a list of symbols; see Section 3.2.1 Rules for Pre-text pages.**

Review of the Literature

There are several ways in which this chapter may be structured: chronologically, categorically, or through related theoretical viewpoints. Emphasis should be placed on the reasons underlying the particular areas, topics, and periods selected for review.

The chapter should:

- provide empirical evidence supporting the historical, theoretical, and research background for the study;
- Define how the investigation differs from other studies in the field;
- Show how the study relates to other research studies in similar areas;
- Include any theoretical foundations, expert opinions, and prior research findings.
- Use primary sources relating to the basis of your research whenever possible.

Methodology

This chapter describes the research design or approach in depth. This should be a detailed and clearly written description that permits a precise replication of the study. Several elements of this chapter are customary to a quantitative thesis, however may be appropriate to a non-quantitative thesis as well.

Design of the Investigation: Explain how the study is designed to investigate each question or hypothesis. If appropriate, identify all variables and how they are manipulated.

Population and/or Sample: Describe the principal characteristics of the population selected. If a random sample is used, describe the general population from which the sample was selected and the sampling procedure used.

Treatment: Describe the exact sequence followed to collect and tabulate the data. Describe the instrument(s) used to collect the data and establish the validity of the instrument(s) via studies by other researchers.

Data Analysis Procedures: Describe and explain data analysis procedures and/or statistical treatments used. Include descriptions of tests, formulae, computer programs, and procedures.

Findings

This section reports on and discusses the findings of the study.

Presentation of the Findings: The results of the investigation are presented in narrative form and may be supplemented with graphics. Whenever appropriate, use tables and figures to present the data. If tables and figures are used you must have a corresponding list in your pre-text pages, see *Section 3.2.1 Rules for Pre-text pages*.

Discussion of the Findings: The discussion of the results should be well argued in relation to each question or hypothesis. Inferences, projections, and probable explanations of the results may also be included. Discuss the implications of patterns and trends, and include any secondary findings.

Implications

The concluding section should summarize the entire research effort. A sufficiently comprehensive overview should enable the intended audience to understand the entire study. At this point it is appropriate to reacquaint the reader with the conceptual framework, the design of the investigation, the methodology, and the results of the study. This section should include the significance of the study and its conclusions, the limitations and weaknesses of the study, implications for future research, and recommendations.

References

Cite references according to your discipline's appropriate style guide (APA format) and be sure to include every source cited in the study, including material that has been adapted for use in tables and figures.

Appendices

Material too detailed for inclusion in the body of the text, or material that cannot be effectively presented due to its length or size may be included in the appendices. Tables and graphs that have been introduced in the main body of the thesis are required to be included in the text immediately following the first reference. They should not be placed in the appendices. Appendices might include such things as questionnaires, raw data, maps, photos, artwork, letters of permission to reproduce material, and personal correspondence.

Arrangement and Content Rules

Your thesis must include the following sections ***IN THIS ORDER***:

Pre-text pages

1. Evaluation Page (required)
2. Title Page (required)
3. Copyright Page (optional)
4. Acknowledgements (optional)
5. Table of Contents (required)
6. List of Tables (required - if tables used)
7. List of Figures (required - if figures used)
8. List of Abbreviations or Symbols (if used)
9. Abstract (required)

Thesis Content (Body of Text)

10. Body (required - pagination begins here—see Section 3.4.3)

Post-text pages

11. References/Bibliography (required)
12. Appendices (optional)

Evaluation Page (required)

The Evaluation page serves as a coversheet to your entire thesis. The page is dated the day that you submit your final thesis and is signed by each member of your committee; see *Appendix E* for the format requirements of the Evaluation page. The page will not be counted and is not numbered.

Original signatures must be in indelible black ink. All signatures must be those of the actual

committee member; substitute signatures are unacceptable. All theses must be approved and signed by the Director of Graduate Studies.

Note: Your committee will sign this cover sheet only after you have successfully completed all corrections required by the committee. After all editing corrections have been completed, and you have passed your orals, each committee member will sign the Master's Degree Final Evaluation Report, (see *Appendix F*). This is a separate form that serves as the official notice to the Graduate Office that this part of your master's degree exit requirement is completed. Signing this form will also change any "Incomplete" grades for courses (ED 603M, CJ 603M, etc) related to the thesis to a normal letter grade.

Title Page (required)

Follow the sample in *Appendix E*. The title page consists of evenly spaced components, centered on the page. The page will be counted as page 1, but not numbered. See the table in *Section 3.3.2 Pagination* for correct Pagination format guidelines.

Copyright Page (optional)

This page is used if the work is to be copyrighted. If used, the pagination for all pre-text pages begins with this page as ii (See the table in *Section 3.3.2 Pagination*). Wording should begin 10 enter strokes from the first line, including a c-world insignia, your full name, defense date and All Rights Reserved; follow the sample in *Appendix E*. **If your thesis is copyrighted, you must include a c-world © insignia on the title page.**

Acknowledgements Page (optional)

Although the body of the thesis is usually written in the third person, this section, if included, is usually written in the first person. Here you may wish to explain certain features of the thesis. It is also customary to recognize the assistance of your Chair and/or members of the writing/advisory committee, as well as others who contributed to their thesis. Specific contributions by other persons or institutions should be acknowledged, especially if financial support was received. The top margin for this page is also 1 3/4".

Table of Contents (required)

The table is extremely important, and MUST be accurate. All titles, subheadings, and page numbers must correspond **exactly** to the body of the thesis. **Single-space the table.** Use **tab leaders** between titles and page numbers. For best results, wait until your thesis is totally completed before writing the Table of Contents¹⁰.

The heading "TABLE OF CONTENTS" should appear in capital letters 1-3/4" down from the top of the page. Second and subsequent pages, if any, begin 1-1/4" down from the top of the page and maintain the headings of "CHAPTER" and "PAGE" on the left and right margins respectively. Follow the sample in

¹⁰ University, Western Carolina. "WCU Graduate Thesis Guide 7th Edition." Cullowhee, NC, October 2010.

Appendix E. If the table of contents requires a full page, then double space between the last line of type and the page number at the bottom of the page.

List of Tables (required if tables are used)

“Tables” are tabulated numerical data used in the body of the thesis (or appendix). If you have tables in the body of your thesis, you must create an accurate master list.

The list of tables follows the table of contents on a new page. The title falls 1-3/4" down from the top of the page, and must be capitalized: LIST OF TABLES. Number the tables with Arabic numerals, and underline (e.g. Table 1) in chronological order as they appear in the thesis. Double-space between titles. Follow the sample in *Appendix E*. Be sure that the list of tables corresponds with titles and page numbers identical to those used in the thesis. Narrative or captions that follow a table title should not be included in the list. Appendix tables are not included in this list.

For more information on tables, see section 3.4.3: General Rules. Follow the sample in Appendix E.

List of Figures (required if figures are used)

“Figures” are any non-textual materials, such as illustrations, charts, graphs, maps, photographs, drawings, diagrams, musical scores, etc. If you have figures in the body of your thesis, you must create an accurate master list¹¹. The title falls 1-3/4" down from the top of the page and must be capitalized: LIST OF FIGURES. Number the figures with Arabic numerals, and underline (e.g. Figure 1) in chronological order as they appear in the thesis. Double-space between titles. Follow the sample for the List of Tables in *Appendix E*. Be sure that the list of figures corresponds with titles and page numbers identical to those used in the thesis. Narrative or captions that follow a figure should not be included in the list. Appendix figures are also not included in this list.

List of Symbols (required if symbols are used)

A List of Symbols sometimes referred to as *Nomenclature*, can be a valuable aid. If you use symbols or abbreviations frequently throughout your thesis, you should create a master list. This list follows the list of figures on a new page as well as the identical format guidelines as the lists of tables and figures.

Abstract

An abstract is a required component for all theses which should provide the reader with the essential information about the thesis and an overview of the study. It should be written in complete sentences and include statements of the problem, procedure or methods, results and conclusions. The abstract should include accomplishments, the most pertinent facts and implications of the study, and a brief explanation of the work, and should not exceed 250 words (approximately 1-1/2 pages in length).

¹¹ University, Western Carolina. "WCU Graduate Thesis Guide 7th Edition." Cullowhee, NC, October 2010.

Mathematical formulae, diagrams, footnotes, illustrative materials, and quotations should not be used in the abstract.

Type the word "ABSTRACT" in capitals 1-3/4" down from the top, centered within the required margins. Triple space and type the complete title of the thesis in bold-type. Double-space and type "by," the author's name, degree for which the thesis is being prepared, Your Program and Department, the University's name and date of graduation, **each on a separate line**. If a copyright is to be involved, a c-world (©) should be typed before the author's name, and the year of copyright should follow the name. Follow the sample in *Appendix E*.

Rules for Thesis Content (Body of Text)

The body of the text explains, illustrates, argues for, and in some cases proves by organizing in a coherent manner the evidence gathered from various sources. The thesis will usually be divided into several chapters, some or all of which may be prescribed by your committee, it is important to verify an appropriate outline with you Chair. The text should be clear, accurate, and written in an academic, scholarly style. The presentation of your thesis is as important as your research; take ample time to edit and proofread the final copy of the work carefully.

When typing the body of the text, follow to these important requirements:

- There should always be at least two lines of a paragraph on any given page. This is of concern when the paragraph begins at the bottom or ends at the top of a page.
- Do not divide the last word on a page.
- Make sure to capitalize each chapter's title, i.e. Literature Review, Methodology.
- All chapter subheadings should be bold-type.

Rules for Post-text pages

Reference section

The reference section should be preceded by a half-title page which is counted but not numbered. The title of this section (for example, "Bibliography" or "References Cited") is determined by the departmental style guide (APA format) and should be typed in capital letters and centered on the half-title page. The same title is repeated 1-3/4" down from the top of the first page of the reference section. Triple space between the title and the first entry in the list of references.

Appendices

An appendix contains material too detailed for inclusion in the body of the work. When diverse materials are included, create an appendix for each group of data (e.g., computer printouts, questionnaires, correspondence, and certain figures). Each appendix is preceded by a half-title page bearing only its label, (i.e. APPENDIX A, APPENDIX B). See *Appendix E* for how appendices are incorporated into the Table of Contents.

Appendices are paginated just as the chapters are. Place the page number at the bottom of the page. Appendices will vary in format, and a certain degree of freedom is allowable. Spacing (single or double) is determined by the content; the decision to include the information is based on readability and overall appearance.

Formatting Guidelines¹²

General Rules

Your **entire thesis** must conform to these rules:

Margins	Top, Bottom, and Right: <u>one inch</u> (1"). Left: one and a half inches (1½").
Font	Times New Roman or Arial ONLY. 12 point font ONLY . All text must be the same font and size , including page numbers.
Text	Double space body text. (Exceptions apply for title page, Table of Contents, footnotes, and other special text.) Do NOT justify the text. Tabs should be set at ½". New paragraphs must be indented ½". All text must be in black ink.
Chapters	Each major section/chapter of the thesis must begin on a new page. Do not insert blank sheets between sections/chapters.
Chapter Titles	CAPITALIZE and CENTER. Do not bold or underline chapter titles. Insert at least two blank lines between titles and body text. (Sub-headings within chapters should follow the style guide in your department (APA format)
Pagination	Page numbers must appear in the lower right hand corner . For detailed rules, see 3.4.3: Pagination.
Tables/Figures	Tables and figures must not exceed margins (see above). All tables/figures must be numbered and labeled according to discipline guidelines (see Appendix E). If they are not original, you must cite them and comply with Fair use and U.S. Copyright rules (See Section 1.6). Extensive tables/figures should appear at the end of the chapter or in an appendix.

Software Capabilities and Pre-formatting¹³

Familiarize yourself with the recent versions of Microsoft Office (MS) programs, especially Microsoft Word. While the University does not endorse or recommend any particular brand of software, most students find it easiest to use these programs. In particular, make sure you understand the following functions:

- Tabs and tab "leaders" (especially for the Table of Contents)

¹² University, Western Carolina. "WCU Graduate Thesis Guide 7th Edition." Cullowhee, NC, October 2010.

¹³ University, Western Carolina. "WCU Graduate Thesis Guide 7th Edition." Cullowhee, NC, October 2010

- Headers and footers
- Pagination
- Sections and section breaks
- Rulers
- Show/Hide Characters button (“¶” on the toolbar)

Knowing how to use the functions above will save you hours of work and frustration.

Perhaps even more important are the functions you should NOT use. Unless you are *extremely* proficient with the software, we recommend that you severely limit (or turn off) the following tools:

- AutoCorrect and AutoFormat
- Preformatted headings, themes, or templates

These functions are the primary culprits when you have trouble with numbered lists and unwanted changes to headings and titles.

Thesis Software Tips for MS Word Users

The following are a few important tips to help you with file and document management as your thesis takes written form:

BEFORE starting a new document:

- Select “Print Layout” under the View tab to see how your document will look when printed.
- Set page margins according to the rules in this guide.
- The default tab setting in MS Word is ½”. **Do not change this setting.** All tabs and indentations in your thesis must be ½”.
- Keep rulers (found under the View tab) visible at all times.
- Turn on AutoSave and save your document at regular intervals. Keep backup copies of everything.
- You may wish to turn OFF the “AutoFormat” function (found under Tools). This will stop MS Word from automatically changing headings and numbering as you type.
- Do not pre-format or paginate chapters or sections.

DURING the writing of your document:

- For now, save the separate sections of your thesis (individual chapters, etc.) in separate files. Use distinct file names, including a notation about the date or draft number. e.g. Chap1-Intro-vers2.doc
- Use the **tab key** (default setting to ½”), **NOT** the space bar, to indent all paragraphs or tab any text.
- Be familiar with the Show/Hide Characters function (“¶”) on the toolbar. This tool toggles on and off, and shows hidden errors in spacing and format.
- Use Symbols and Special Characters (under the Insert tab) for foreign languages and special punctuation.

AFTER writing your document:

- When your thesis is *completely finished* (after you have defended), combine your separate files into one master file.
- Prepare your abstract, Table of Contents and other “front matter” according to the rules and samples in this guide. (See *Section 3.2.1: Rules for Pretext Pages*)
- ****Insert a section break between the end of the front matter and the body of your thesis.** This will allow you to put page numbers in the body of the text and make sure they continue from the previous section.
- *Paginate your thesis last*, and then complete your Table of Contents. Be sure you have followed all formatting rules before submitting it to the Graduate School.

Pagination

Pretext Pages

All pretext pages will use i., ii. iii. Numeral format. **Note that page numbers do NOT appear on the Evaluation Page or Title Page.** However, pagination does count beginning with the Title Page, although the page number will not be printed on it. Please follow the table below to reference correct pagination.

Thesis Content (Body of Text)

Page numbers must appear in the *lower right hand corner of all body text*. **Use Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) for all thesis content chapters, reference/bibliography pages and appendices.** Use consecutive Arabic numerals throughout; do not restart numbering at the beginning of sections/chapters.

	Counts towards pagination	Counts As Page Number	Print Page Number on Page(s)
Example with Copyright Page			
Evaluation Page	N	n/a	N
Title Page	Y	i.	N
Copyright Page (optional)	Y	ii.	Y
Acknowledgments	Y	iii.	Y
1-page Table of Contents	Y	iii.	Y
1-page abstract	Y	iv.	Y
First page of thesis content (first chapter or intro)	Y	1,2,3....	Y
References/Bibliography	Y	...4	
Appendices	Y	...5	Y

Note that if you include a *List of Tables* and/or *List of Figures*, they will fall under pretext pagination format (i., ii., iii.) and numbers will be printed on the pages.

The first page of thesis content (body of text) will always begin with Arabic numeral 1.

Special materials/Photographs:

Photographs and pictures are considered “figures” and should follow the rules for figures explained in *Section 3.2.1*, including labeling. If any pictures are not your original material, you must obtain written permission from the owner, as explained in *Section 1.6.1*.

Recordings and Others:

Musical or sound recordings, electronic slideshows, and other special materials that are not part of the thesis document, that may be incorporated into your defense should be properly referenced per your department’s style guide (APA format) in your written thesis references section. All non original audio and visual material must follow copyright and fair use rules, as explained in *Section 6.1*.

Oversized Materials, Slides, and other Special Cases

The use of non-electronic slides or special printouts is not recommended. Consult your Chair if you have unusual materials or circumstances that cannot be reproduced electronically.

Quotations¹⁴

If you are to use quotations in your thesis, it is advised to use them sparingly, keep them brief, and work them into the flow of your own narrative. **If a long quotation must be used, take it out of the body of the text, indent, and single-space.** Quotations treated in this manner are called block quotations. **Quotation marks are not used for block quotations.**

The omission of a word or phrase from a quotation is indicated by an ellipsis, or three spaced periods (. . .), at the point of omission. If the omitted words would have ended a sentence, a fourth period should be added to indicate the normal terminal punctuation.

A quotation must conform to the original in every detail. Do not correct misspellings or other errors, but insert after them the Latin word *sic* in brackets [*sic*] to show that the error was in the original. Brackets, not parentheses, are used to insert a clarifying word or phrase of your own into quoted material. When your thesis is completed, you should check all quotations against the original sources to ensure absolute accuracy.

¹⁴ Princeton University. “Thesis Guidelines.” Princeton, NJ. 2010.

Oral Defense and Printing

Oral Defense

All final evaluations (except the written comprehensive examinations), require the candidate to complete an oral examination. Your Chair will notify you when you are ready to defend, which can be no later than the tenth week of your graduating term. Your committee will oversee your oral defense, and evaluate your thesis accordingly. The focus of the oral examination is usually the written manuscript, portfolio, and/or product produced by the candidate. However, the committee is not limited in their range and scope of inquiry.

Before your defense, prepare a blank Evaluation Page (See *Appendix E* and bring a blank copy of the Master's Degree Final Evaluation Report for your committee to sign their approval after a successful defense. This is due to the Graduate Office by Wednesday of the last week of the term.

In the event the defense is unsatisfactory, the committee shall so inform the candidate and counsel possible future actions. The results of the oral defense shall be reported in writing to the Graduate Office along with a statement of the future action to be taken by the candidate.

A final grade (A-F) for course work related to the thesis (Ed 603M, Sped 603M, CJ 603M, etc.) cannot be awarded until the candidate's writing committee approves the finished product and a final copy is filed with the Graduate Office. If the student does not finish their thesis or professional project, the student will have a permanent "Incomplete" or an "F" grade listed on their transcript for thesis project related courses.

Final Manuscript

After successfully completing their oral defense, candidates must provide the Graduate Office one unbound manuscript. **You cannot graduate until your final thesis is approved by the Graduate Director and has been submitted successfully for cataloging and printing.** The unbound manuscript must be printed on 8.5"X11" white cotton bond paper.

Cotton Bond Paper: Cotton bond paper contains a minimum of 25% cotton bond fiber and has a weight of at least 20 lbs. Each sheet should have a watermark with the cotton content noted. Cotton bond paper should be white for all documents and should not have texture or design lines. The same paper must be purchased to print the entire document and any corrections needed after submission.

A fee will be assessed to cover the cost of producing a library copy. Additional copies for your personal use are available per the fee. The Graduate Office copy will be permanently housed in Western Oregon University's library and available to the public. Please see the Graduate Office for a current estimate of these publishing costs.

Copyright

In the US, if you have created an original document, it is automatically copyrighted for the period of your lifetime plus fifty years. *Formal notice or registration is not necessary*; nevertheless, you should include a copyright page see *Appendix E* in your document to alert readers that you are the copyright

owner and that you acknowledge your legal rights. You may wish to register your copyright, though this step is optional. Registration establishes public record of your document, its copyright and your name and address. If you are interested in formally copyrighting your thesis, you can visit <http://www.copyright.gov/>

APPENDIX A: Thesis Check Sheet

Be sure you can answer YES to all the questions below, and follow the Format Checklist on the following pages before you submit your final thesis to the Graduate Office

1. Have you successfully defended your thesis?
 Yes **No**

2. Have you read and followed the Graduate School's Thesis Manual?
 Yes **No**

3. Has anyone besides you checked this final draft for spelling/grammatical errors?
 Yes **No**

4. Have you used the citation style specified by your department (APA format)?
 Yes **No**

5. Has your Chair checked your references?
 Yes **No**

6. In addition to the citation of sources, have you followed the format specified in question 4 for all body text, including tables, figures, and headings?
 Yes **No**

7. Are all pictures, recordings, and special/additional material your original work? If not, have you secured written permission to reprint?
 Yes **No**

Formatting Checklist

General Document

ALL PAGES

- Margins: Top, Right, and Bottom = 1"; Left = 1 ½"
- Font: **all text** Arial or Times New Roman, 12 point
- Pagination:
 - No page numbers in front matter, but pages counted i.,ii,
 - Body and back matter numbered with consecutive Arabic numerals (beginning at "1")
 - Page numbers in bottom right corner
- Parts included and in **the following order**:
 1. Title page
 2. Copyright page (optional)
 3. Acknowledgements (optional)
 4. Table of Contents
 5. Lists of Tables
 6. List of Figures
 7. List of Abbreviations/Symbols (if used)
 8. Abstract
 9. Thesis Content (Body text)
 10. References/Works Cited/Bibliography
 11. Appendices (optional)

Title Page

- Title in **bold**
- Student's full legal name in byline
- Text matches sample and "General Rules" above
- Copyright included IF DESIRED and paid for
- No page number appears until Copyright page** (through to first page of body text)

Acknowledgements (optional)

- Heading centered and all caps, at least three spaces between heading and text

Table of Contents

- Heading centered and all caps
- At least triple space between Heading and text
- Titles of all chapters and subheadings match **exactly** with body
- Page numbers match **exactly** with body
- Single-spaced
- Headings and subheadings indented
- Page number references aligned right
- Tab leaders (periods) used between text and page numbers
- All** sections, chapters, and subsections/subheadings listed

Lists of Tables, Figures, Abbreviations

- See rules for Table of Contents. All labels in body **must** match front matter lists.

Abstract

- Heading centered and all caps, triple space between heading/text
- Matches sample in Appendix E

Body Text

- New chapters begin on new page, titles centered and in all caps
- Triple space between headings and text
- Headings follow appropriate discipline guide (Appendix B)
- All text double-spaced (except for footnotes, etc.)
- At least triple space between text & tables/figures
- Tables/figures **labeled** according to department guide (default APA) and are student's **original** work.

Works Cited and Appendices

- Page numbers, headings, margins follow same rules as body text

APPENDIX B: “Developing a Thesis” by Harvard University

Harvard University

Developing a Thesis

Think of yourself as a member of a jury, listening to a lawyer who is presenting an opening argument. You'll want to know very soon whether the lawyer believes the accused to be guilty or not guilty, and how the lawyer plans to convince you. Readers of academic essays are like jury members: before they have read too far, they want to know what the essay argues as well as how the writer plans to make the argument. After reading your thesis statement, the reader should think, "This essay is going to try to convince me of something. I'm not convinced yet, but I'm interested to see how I might be."

An effective thesis cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." A thesis is not a topic; nor is it a fact; nor is it an opinion. "Reasons for the fall of communism" is a topic. "Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe" is a fact known by educated people. "The fall of communism is the best thing that ever happened in Europe" is an opinion. (Superlatives like "the best" almost always lead to trouble. It's impossible to weigh every "thing" that ever happened in Europe. And what about the fall of Hitler? Couldn't that be "the best thing"?)

A good thesis has two parts. It should tell what you plan to argue, and it should "telegraph" how you plan to argue—that is, what particular support for your claim is going where in your essay.

Steps in Constructing a Thesis

First, analyze your primary sources. Look for tension, interest, ambiguity, controversy, and/or complication. Does the author contradict himself or herself? Is a point made and later reversed? What are the deeper implications of the author's argument? Figuring out the why to one or more of these questions, or to related questions, will put you on the path to developing a working thesis. (Without the why, you probably have only come up with an observation—that there are, for instance, many different metaphors in such-and-such a poem—which is not a thesis.)

Once you have a working thesis, write it down. There is nothing as frustrating as hitting on a great idea for a thesis, then forgetting it when you lose concentration. And by writing down your thesis you will be forced to think of it clearly, logically, and concisely. You probably will not be able to write out a final-draft version of your thesis the first time you try, but you'll get yourself on the right track by writing down what you have.

Keep your thesis prominent in your introduction. A good, standard place for your thesis statement is at the end of an introductory paragraph, especially in shorter (5-15 page) essays. Readers are used to finding theses there, so they automatically pay more attention when they read the last sentence of your introduction. Although this is not required in all academic essays, it is a good rule of thumb.

Anticipate the counter-arguments. Once you have a working thesis, you should think about what might be said against it. This will help you to refine your thesis, and it will also make you think of the arguments that you'll need to refute later on in your essay. (Every argument has a counter-argument. If yours doesn't, then it's not an argument—it may be a fact, or an opinion, but it is not an argument.)

Michael Dukakis lost the 1988 presidential election because he failed to campaign vigorously after the Democratic National Convention.

This statement is on its way to being a thesis. However, it is too easy to imagine possible counter-arguments. For example, a political observer might believe that Dukakis lost because he suffered from a "soft-on-crime" image. If you complicate your thesis by anticipating the counter-argument, you'll strengthen your argument, as shown in the sentence below.

While Dukakis' "soft-on-crime" image hurt his chances in the 1988 election, his failure to campaign vigorously after the Democratic National Convention bore a greater responsibility for his defeat.

Some Caveats and Some Examples

A thesis is never a question. Readers of academic essays expect to have questions discussed, explored, or even answered. A question ("Why did communism collapse in Eastern Europe?") is not an argument, and without an argument, a thesis is dead in the water.

A thesis is never a list. "For political, economic, social and cultural reasons, communism collapsed in Eastern Europe" does a good job of "telegraphing" the reader what to expect in the essay—a section about political reasons, a section about economic reasons, a section about social reasons, and a section about cultural reasons. However, political, economic, social and cultural reasons are pretty much the only possible reasons why communism could collapse. This sentence lacks tension and doesn't advance an argument. Everyone knows that politics, economics, and culture are important.

A thesis should never be vague, combative or confrontational. An ineffective thesis would be, "Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe because communism is evil." This is hard to argue (evil from whose perspective? what does evil mean?) and it is likely to mark you as moralistic and judgmental rather than rational and thorough. It also may spark a defensive reaction from readers sympathetic to communism. If readers strongly disagree with you right off the bat, they may stop reading.

An effective thesis has a definable, arguable claim. "While cultural forces contributed to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the disintegration of economies played the key role in driving its decline" is an effective thesis sentence that "telegraphs," so that the reader expects the essay to have a section about cultural forces and another about the disintegration of economies. This thesis makes a definite, arguable claim: that the disintegration of economies played a more important role than cultural forces in defeating communism in Eastern Europe. The reader would react to this statement by thinking, "Perhaps what the author says is true, but I am not convinced. I want to read further to see how the author argues this claim."

A thesis should be as clear and specific as possible. Avoid overused, general terms and abstractions. For example, "Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe because of the ruling elite's inability to address the economic concerns of the people" is more powerful than "Communism collapsed due to societal discontent."

APPENDIX C: Thesis Topic/Committee Pre-Approval Form

REQUEST TO CONDUCT GRADUATE THESIS OR PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

PRE-APPROVAL FORM

Title of Project: _____

Graduate Student: _____

Type of final exit activity: Thesis Field Study Professional Project

Expected date of project completion: _____

1. Does this study require the use of human subjects? If yes, attach your [Institutional Review Board application](#) and the approval memo from the IRB.

NOTE: Establishing of a Committee and, if necessary, IRB approval must be completed before data are collected.

- Yes
- No

2. Attach a copy of the candidate's Thesis, Field Study, or Professional Project Proposal. (Proposals should be four pages or less; see chapter IV of [Guidelines for the Development of a Master's Degree Thesis, Professional Project, or Field Study](#))

3. Examination/Writing Committee Members:

Committee Chair:

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Committee Members:

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Director of Graduate Programs:

Name: _____ Signature: _____

APPENDIX D: IRB FAQ

**Western Oregon University
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Frequently Asked Questions**

Please see the IRB website for the most up-to-date information pertaining to questions:
<http://www.wou.edu/provost/irb/index.php>

APPENDIX E: Sample Thesis Pages

SAMPLE EVALUATION PAGE

The undersigned members of the Graduate Faculty of Western Oregon University
Have examined the enclosed thesis entitled:

Title of Thesis
Bold and Single-Spaced

Presented by: **Your First Middle Last name**

A candidate for the degree of: Master of **Arts or Science, Your Program**

And hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for this master's degree.

Date: Month, Day, 20XX

Chairperson:

Dr. Faculty Member's name
Position (Associate Professor, etc), Dept

Committee member:

Dr. Faculty Member's name
Position (Associate Professor, etc), Dept.

Committee member:

Committee or Faculty Member's name Position,
Agency/Institution

Director of Graduate Programs:

Dr. Linda Stonecipher

SAMPLE TITLE PAGE

Thesis Title Here
Subtitle

By
John William Doe
A thesis submitted to Western Oregon
University

In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of:
Master of Arts or Science in Your Program.

May 2010

©2010 by John William Doe

← Title must match Abstract and page one title exactly. Do not boldface the title. Return twice after the title.

← Defense Date

SAMPLE COPYRIGHT PAGE

© 2010 John William Doe.
May 2010.
All rights reserved.

SAMPLE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS PAGE

This page is optional but recommended. The content of the page is entirely up to you. Use same text spacing either 1.5 or double space.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank those who have helped me in researching and writing this thesis. I appreciate the help of...

SAMPLE TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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SAMPLE LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF TABLES	
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SAMPLE ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis (in bold): Subtitle (also in bold)

By

©2010 John William Doe
Master of Arts or Science in Your Program
Western Oregon University
Month, Day, Year

Text of the abstract, summarizing the thesis goes here. Make sure to double space all text. Most abstracts are between 250 and 500 words, try and keep it to a page to a page and a half. Standard formatting rules apply.

SAMPLE BODY OF TEXT

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Thesis content should follow all formatting guidelines found in *Section 3.2.2 Rules for Thesis Content (Body of Text)*. Proper indentation, double spacing, and pagination is required for the entire body of text. Make sure that all Chapter Titles are capitalized, and margins follow correct formatting guidelines. There should always be at least two lines of a paragraph on any given page. This is of concern when the paragraph begins at the bottom or ends at the top of a page. Do not divide the last word on a page.

Subheadings should always be bold and not capitalized.

APPENDIX F: Master's Degree Final Evaluation Form

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY, HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED

- Thesis
- Field Study
- Professional Project

Titled: _____

Presented by: _____
a candidate for the degree of:

and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment of the requirements for this master's degree.

Committee Chair:

Name: _____ Signature: _____
Date: _____

Committee Members:

Name: _____ Signature: _____
Date: _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____
Date: _____

Director of Graduate Programs

Name: _____ Signature: _____
Date: _____