

Thesis Guidelines and Contract

Graduate Committee, College of Communication

Congratulations on your decision to do a thesis to satisfy the requirement for the MA degree! A thesis is an intellectually challenging accomplishment that you can be proud of, and you will learn a great deal in the process. Nevertheless, there are some things you should know about writing a thesis before you undertake the task as it requires skills you may not have mastered in your course work.

First, completing a thesis requires independent work that is very difficult from class work. You will be working alone and setting many of your own deadlines. Students often feel somewhat isolated and miss the camaraderie of working with other students, while others welcome the independence. You will need to develop your own style of working your own routine which may take a little time.

Second, setting a timeline for yourself and meeting self-imposed deadlines is more challenging than meeting the deadlines imposed in your classes. Many students enjoy the flexibility and easily learn to pace themselves; others find it difficult to get things done. A common mistake many students make is to do all their other work first and use whatever time is left over for thesis work. This strategy doesn't produce the consistent, high-quality work needed for the task because all students are too busy to feel they have time left over. Consequently, they find that they need to set aside some time on a regular basis and honor that time commitment just as they would with any other task.

Finally, most students are ill equipped to know how long it can take to finish the thesis. Some students assume they can complete the thesis in one semester. This is virtually impossible. Others assume that they can complete the task in two semesters, and they anticipate being finished by the final deadline for the semester. However, even when allowing two semesters, meeting the semester's deadline depends upon not only the *amount* but the *quality* of the work completed in that time frame. Unlike courses that have a start and stop date, the thesis begins when you start and ends when you finish, regardless of the academic calendar. You must not only be finished in your own mind, but finished at the level of excellence that your committee requires. Your thesis chair schedules the date of the defense when he or she thinks the thesis is ready to be defended, and **oral defenses may not be scheduled after the deadline set by the college**. Faculty members who serve on your committee are under no obligation to set a defense date or pass you on your thesis simply because the deadline for graduation is approaching. Because their signatures go on the thesis, they can pass you only when they feel that the quality of the work meets the standards of excellence set by the College of Communication.

Therefore, you must do the work well in advance of any deadlines and allow ample time for several revisions. Several revisions are the rule rather than the exception, and if English is not your native language, additional revisions are often needed. Because of other demands on faculty members' time, they typically require one week turn-around each time you submit a revision. You must also anticipate that you will need to spend about a week making the changes based on each revision. As a general rule, final drafts of your thesis must be submitted to your committee no less than 10 working days prior to the scheduled defense. **Again, no thesis defense may be scheduled after the college deadline for oral defenses.** Faculty members are rarely available during the break between first and second semester or during the summer, so expect their availability to be limited to the Spring and Fall semesters only.

Now that you understand what is asked of you, the Graduate Committee asks that you and your committee sign a contract.

I promise to work at the highest level of my ability, meet deadlines set by my committee, allow committee members a one week turn-around period for each evaluation of my work, and understand that my committee chair will set a defense date only when he or she is satisfied that my work meets the standards set by the College and believes that I can successfully defend my thesis.

_____ (Student) _____ (Date)

As your committee chair, I promise to help you set an appropriate time line, to evaluate your work in a timely manner (one week turn-around period unless there are unforeseen or unusual circumstances), to set a defense date when I feel the work is ready, and to provide you with the best guidance that I can so that you can successfully defend and complete your thesis.

_____ (Committee Chair) _____ (Date)

As your committee member, I promise to evaluate your work in a timely manner (one week turn-around period unless there are unforeseen or unusual circumstances), to assist your chair whenever possible, and to provide you with the best guidance that I can.

_____ (Committee member) _____ (Date)