

Content-Related Guidelines for MA theses at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw: English Studies – Literature and Culture

A Master's thesis demonstrates the author's ability to work independently on an original piece of research, demonstrates familiarity with the relevant literature and presents the results of the author's research in a clear and organised format. An MA thesis is intended to demonstrate that the student has achieved learning outcomes assigned to the MA seminar. Specifically, the student is expected to show advanced familiarity with the relevant research field and with methodologies in literary and/or cultural studies.

A master's thesis should demonstrate a critical application of specialist knowledge and make an independent contribution to existing scholarship in the area of literary/cultural studies. A master's thesis should showcase the author's advanced ability to carry out an extended academic argument in a logical and organised manner.

It is recommended that a thesis in literary/cultural studies achieves one of the following goals:

- critically analyses literary/cultural works/authors/ schools/genres, through close readings of specific literary/cultural texts (novels, poems, movies, television shows, etc.), grounded in a particular theoretical perspective or with a focus on specific formal or aesthetic tropes, thereby answering a research question posed in the introductory section of the thesis;
- provides a critical overview/interpretation of a particular literary or cultural concept/phenomenon at a given point in time and/or its evolution over time, thereby answering a research question posed in the introductory section of the thesis.

Summary

The summary should be around 250 words long. The finished summary should:

- Clearly state the focus of the thesis, usually by outlining how it addresses specific research questions, thereby maintaining focus and avoiding irrelevant digressions.
- When applicable, describe the dataset and methods used for analysis, offering a clear summary of the analytical approach, including data gathering methods and theoretical frameworks. For theses analyzing specific literary/cultural texts, the primary texts to be examined in subsequent chapters must be listed.
- Provide a clear overview of the research outcomes or conclusions.

Keywords

5-7 specific terms or phrases that encapsulate the essence of the thesis content arranged alphabetically.

Table of Contents

A list of the major sections of the thesis, including chapters, bibliography, appendixes (if applicable) alongside their page numbers.

Introduction

This chapter sets out the background for the research. The introduction to the MA thesis should:

- Formulate the topic of the thesis in literary/cultural studies, providing a context to the author's work.
- Determine the scope of the research by narrowing down the focus.
- Speak about the existing research and show how the topic is relevant, by identifying the gap in the literature.
- State the research question(s) and tell about the purpose of the study.
- Briefly outline how the thesis is organized and tell what information is going to be included in each chapter.
- Discuss the methods that are going to be used for achieving the stated research goals
- If applicable, provide definitions of key terms that are going to be used throughout the thesis.

The Literature Review

A thesis in literary/cultural studies does not need to contain a separate chapter devoted to the review of existing literature on the topic. It may contain such a chapter [usually Chapter 1], if the supervisor and thesis author determine it necessary. A thesis must, however, engage existing academic research on the topic in a critical manner. The purpose of engaging with previous research on the topic of the thesis is to demonstrate the author's background research and their ability to think critically about broader issues in literary/cultural studies. Such engagement may take place in the content chapters of the thesis or in the introduction.

Chapters

It is recommended that each chapter should begin with a brief introduction, presenting its content and goal. It should also end with a short summing up section, and possibly a reference to what will be covered in the following chapter and how it relates to the general goal of the thesis. This is called 'flagging' or 'signposting', and is crucial for making it evident that the thesis has been written with a clear idea of how the content is organized into chapters.

Conclusion

The point of the conclusion, just like for an academic essay, is to ensure that readers understand that the research goals stated in the introduction have been achieved. Therefore, the conclusion reminds the readers about the research questions and the framework in which these questions operate, as well as what the investigations carried out in the thesis have revealed. Please note that it does not repeat the introduction verbatim - it addresses the research question in the light of the analysis

Bibliography/References/Works Cited (depending on the formatting style)

An alphabetical list of primary and secondary sources that were quoted, paraphrased, summarised, or otherwise used in the thesis. It should be formatted according to the MLA or CMS stylesheet (chosen together with the thesis supervisor).

Appendix (optional)

Appendix contains additional information that is relevant but is too long or too detailed to include in the main body of your work. It may contain visuals, charts, graphs, etc.