Dissertation, MA Thesis, Article Package

You need to read this carefully before you get started on your dissertation, thesis, or publishable research paper!!

How to get started:
First, work on a good and solid proposal that defines all the terms and addresses all the possible questions you will have later down the road. You can do that by formulating a clear research question, a tentative answer to it (hypothesis), a research design, a methodology, and a preliminary bibliography. Define all the relevant terms and operationalize all concepts and variables. E.g. if you want to write about democracy – how will you define it in such a way that you can say that there is more of it or less of it / that is has improved or diminished?

The research design is crucial: what kind of study will this be? What kind of empirical evidence would you need to present in order to support your argument? What will convince anybody who does not accept your argument? How can this study be done best, that is: most efficiently, with in the least amount of time and without having to process a myriad of data? Once your proposal is approved by your thesis or dissertation chair, it needs to be sent around to all committee members for their approval. You can only move forward once all committee members have approved your proposal! If your research involves human subjects, that is: if you plan to talk to, observe, or interview people – then you need to first obtain Human Subjects Approval from the USF IRB Board. You need to take, or update, your human subjects training certificate and submit your proposal to the USF IRB board before you can actually start your research. Failure to obtain IRB approval when conducting research with human subjects might result in legal action and it will invalidate your dissertation!

The thesis / dissertation itself
Be aware that the best way to proceed with a thesis or dissertation is that you write a chapter, just like a paper, and give it to your advisor for comments. Each chapter has to be self-standing, that is: it needs to have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, just like a paper. Once you are done with all the chapters, then you add a general conclusion, where you sum up the findings and provide a sort of outlook. Finally, you add the introduction, which hopefully can grow out of your proposal. In it, you start explaining why this topic is relevant; how you will approach it (methodology); and you present your main findings (which are why your write it last). Then you add a section called "Chapter Overview", where you describe what you do in each chapter, including in the conclusion. The introduction is a sort of roadmap that tells the reader what exactly you will do, where, and how.

Chapters, just like research papers, are easier to read and understand if they have sub-headers. Sub-headers also make it easier for you to add text at a later moment. At a minimum, every research paper or chapter of your thesis or dissertation needs to have at least three sub-headers: "introduction," a title for the body, and "conclusion." Start a new paragraph for each new topic you discuss and create a new sub-header for each new theme. Research papers and dissertation and thesis chapters are different from research proposals. Proposals are internal documents that explain what exactly you will do and how. A research paper or a chapter in your thesis or dissertation should not contain the same technical sub-headers as the proposal, so: no more "hypothesis," "theoretical discussions," "substantive focus," or "research question" in your paper or chapter. Instead use captivating

sub-headers that capture the content and trigger the interest of the reader. A paper or chapter should not contain any bullet lists and you should write out lower numbers and most symbols, so "twelve" instead of 12 and "percent" instead of %.

Any technical term needs to be introduced and explained the first time it appears. Write out all acronyms the first time you refer to them, then give the acronym in parenthesis. Only after you have done that can you just use acronyms, so "University of South Florida (USF)." When quoting or citing an author the first time, give his or her full name and the date of the specific publication you refer to. So: "According to Thomas Smith (2008)…" – and not: "According to Smith…" After the first time, just use the family name: "Smith (2008)." Every direct quote requires the name, date of publication, and the page number as a reference, so: "…" (Smith, 2008:36). If you do not quote verbatim but just cite a publication as a reference, no page number is required, so: … (Smith, 2008).

Academic writing needs to be as precise and specific as possible. Different from fiction writing, avoid connotations and implicit meanings. There should be no dramatic build-up and no plot in academic writing. The reader should not have to find out something new towards the end. Instead, state your theory, argument, and methods early on and use the paper or chapter to present empirical evidence in support of your argument. Formulate as explicitly as you can. Everything you write needs to relate to your argument. If this is not clear, you need to explain why and how the information you provide relates to your argument.

Once you have a complete final draft, your advisor and chair will send it to the other committee members, who you and your chair have previously invited to participate. They then give you comments on the complete draft and decide if it is ready for a defense. If they agree, you can schedule the defense. This whole process takes quite a bit of time, definitely more than a semester. Remember that faculty are under 9-months contracts, so they do not really work for USF during summers and instead spend their time traveling, writing, or conducting research. It is thus very difficult (if not impossible) to schedule a defense during the summer months.

You can work on your dissertation or thesis without being enrolled (e.g. during summers) however, you do need to be registered for a minimum of 2 credits during the semester you defend and you need to be enrolled for a minimum of 6 credits throughout the year to maintain your active student status. Remember that a PhD dissertation or a Masters thesis cannot be done in one semester and that you need to schedule your defense date way ahead of time! Be aware of the thesis and dissertation deposit deadlines, which tend to be at least one month before the semester ends. You need to give your committee members a minimum of 6 weeks to give you feedback on your complete dissertation draft (minimum of 4 weeks for a MA thesis). Try to get feedback before your defense date, so you can address and fix any problems before you defend. Make sure you have taken the USF ETD course on time and that you have registered for graduation with USF ETD – or you will not be able to graduate!

Below, you will find some important practical advice. Make yourself **very** familiar with it!

USF

Paper / Thesis / Dissertation Proposal Form

Your name and date,

Title of your dissertation, thesis, or paper.
…

Introduction (max. 1,000 words for a dissertation; 700 words for a MA thesis; 500 words for a term paper):
Provide a short summary of your paper, thesis or dissertation here, explaining the relevance of your topic and providing enough contextual information so a non-specialist can understand what you will do and why it matters. You need to be able to know enough about the topic to be able to write at least 1,000 words on it. If you don't, then pick another topic.

Research Question and Unit of Analysis: Formulate a question you can actually answer given the constraints of time and resources at your disposal; this question must grow out of a current academic discussion and be related to it. *Why* questions are the easiest to answer. Your unit of analysis is what exactly you want to explain: individual behavior / group behavior / state behavior, etc. Make sure your study operates at the same level of analysis you define here, that is: do not analyze state behavior if you want to explain social movements, etc). If this is a case study and if you will use qualitative or historical methods, then: One question only! If this is a quantitative project, then you still should only have one question (with perhaps sub-questions), but you can test more then one answers (hypotheses).
…

Substantive Focus: Explain the empirical reality you will discuss, including geographical and historical information. One (single spaced) page maximum.
…

Specific theoretical discussions addressed: Introduce the academic literature you talk to / take issue with / engage with. One (single spaced) page maximum.
…

Concepts and Definitions: Define your crucial and most relevant terms here so that they can be operationalized, that is: assessed and measured. Define as many concepts as are relevant to your study. Your definitions need to be nominal AND operational, that is: you need to explain how you will be able to say that something has improved, worsened, declined, grown, etc.
…

Hypotheses: Formulate your tentative answer to the research question. If this will be a qualitative / historical project, then you must have one hypothesis only! If you will (and can) conduct quantitative analysis, then you can formulate and test, more than one hypothesis. The hypothesis must be clear, precise, and formulated in such a way it can be verified or falsified.

…

Research Design: Explain the best way to verify your hypothesis. What kind of study would be best suited? What kind of empirical evidence would it take to support your hypothesis? This is the most crucial part of the proposal because you define here what is relevant to your study and what is not, as well as what kind of evidence you would need and what you can ignore. A good design also anticipates possible alternative explanations and proposes way how to control, or invalidate them. For example, if you want to argue that it is because of high levels of civicness that a country, city, or region has achieved high levels of government responsiveness, then think of ways to control for possible alternative explanations, focusing on class, or political institutions.
One (single spaced) page maximum.

…

Methodology and Data Collection Plan: Explain where and how you can find the empirical evidence you need to support your hypothesis. Specify if you will use any data sets, interviews (how many, with whom), and explain how you will get access to these sources. One (single spaced) page maximum.

Your Contribution: Explain what gaps in the current literature you have identified and how your thesis, dissertation or paper will fill these gaps. Answer what exactly your contribution will be. One (single spaced) page maximum.

…

Tentative Chapter Outline (if this is a paper: subheadings)

…

Preliminary Bibliography (make sure there is enough relevant literature about your topic before you commit to it!) List at least 20 items (academic books and peer-reviewed articles)

…

How to Write a Research Paper or chapter for your thesis or dissertation

A) Style and Structure

All essays should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Essays should make a point or an argument.

Consider the argument of a book review. In most cases, monographic studies address a debate in their discipline. They take a position that accepts, illustrates, and perhaps refines the prevailing wisdom in the field, or they criticize that prevailing wisdom and present data to support an alternative explanation of the phenomenon under study. Reviewers should present the main point or argument of the book or books they treat, along with their evaluation of the arguments, logic, evidence, coherence, and clarity of the book or books. Student reviewers should be able to reread their reviews two years after writing them and effectively recall the key ideas and substance of a book, as well as their evaluation or criticism of it.

Writers should always make the logic of their thought explicit, on the level of overall organization, on the level of paragraphs, and on the level of sentences. They should also make explicit the logic of the processes they describe or analyze.

Paragraphs should begin with topic sentences, and long paragraphs should be broken into smaller ones, each with its own topic sentence. One of the reasons why long paragraphs usually do not make their thought as clear as shorter ones is that long paragraphs include more than one component of a thought, but they contain only one topic sentence. Breaking up a long paragraph into two or more smaller ones, therefore, is not simply responding to esthetic desires for more white space on a page. Rather, the breaking up of paragraphs forces writers to link the components of an argument with more topic sentences, thereby making their logic more explicit.

Illustrations, or examples, preferably brief, should be provided for each generalization.

Writers should write for a hypothetical intelligent but uninformed reader, so that they are forced to make explicit the logic and the data on which they make their argument.

In selecting words for strong and effective argument, remember that verbs are much stronger than nouns or other types of words, and that transitive verbs (those that force the reader to include a subject and an object, i.e., to state who did what to whom) in the active voice are the strongest. Avoid passives and intransitive verbs (for they tend to lose information, because passives do not require a subject and intransitives do not require an object) and impersonal constructions. For example, "a strike occurred" is not as strong as "the workers called a strike" or "the workers went out on strike."

The phrasing below, for example, relies on nouns that the author could have replaced with verbs: "In Japan and in large U.S. corporations, estimates have prognosticated a duplication in the production during the next fifteen to twenty years, with a reduction in employment of between 25 and 40 percent."

A sharp copyeditor could have forced the author to check the data and change the formulation to something like: "Japanese and US corporate studies predict that, over the

next fifteen to twenty years, production will double while employment will decline by 25 to 40 percent."

Students are expected to proofread their papers before submitting them, so that typographical errors and spelling errors have been corrected. Students should routinely do such proofreading, out of self-respect as well as out of respect for their instructor. Proofreading is also essential for proper sentence structure and paragraph structure. Students should allow their writing to "rest" before proofreading. Editing is much more effective when the writing is fresh. If you think something sounded good when you wrote it, you will probably think it sounds good one hour later. After a full day, you will be better able to catch poor wording and sloppy errors.

Spelling or typographical errors will negatively impact your work. Students who are not strong spellers should be attentive to prompts from their word processor's spelling checker. Students who have no firm command of the English language should involve the USF writing center and ask for their assistance before handing in a paper, thesis, or dissertation.

B) Academic Merit within the Field of Political Science
Political science, like any other discipline in the natural or social sciences, seeks to identify patterns, processes, or phenomena and to explain how and why they work the way they do. To explain or illuminate such processes or phenomena, political scientists use analytical concepts to organize data and to formulate and assess explanatory theories and hypotheses. Students writing in the discipline of political science therefore should focus their research and write-up on a key conceptual/theoretical issue of importance to them and to the discipline.

Ideally, in papers, theses, and dissertations, and later in journal articles, one should (1) begin with a brief review of conceptual/ theoretical interpretations or explanations of how some political process or phenomenon works, then (2) show how the prevailing explanation or concept falls short in some way, and (3) finally propose some new concept or refinement of a hypothesis that would better explain the phenomenon. Then one can (4) move to specific, operationalizable hypotheses that can be examined with real data in order to infer the answer to the overarching, broader hypothesis.

Within this framework, one can then elaborate a study that assembles the data to answer one's questions. And as one proceeds with the material, one needs to make systematic, explicit reference to the theories or hypotheses that the material addresses. That is, one should provide the reader with explicit connective tissue that integrates the empirical components of the study with its theoretical and conceptual framework. This task of making a writer's logic explicit is what distinguishes an inspired, outstanding manuscript from an inspired but merely good one.

The identification of shortcomings or needed refinements in a theory or hypothesis usually comes after some work in graduate school, so students at earlier stages are more likely to draw upon an accepted concept or hypothesis to gather and order data to illuminate some specific problem or issue. In comparative politics, for example, one might use a generally accepted hypothesis to organize the questions asked and the data gathered about some

process in a country or context of one's choosing, for example, the role of elite pacting in democratization or the impact of electoral or parliamentary rules on party accountability.

C) Correct Citing of Sources
You are free to choose a recognized citation style in the social sciences, e.g. ASA, APA, Chicago, or Harvard. Style Manuals are available for free on the internet. Make yourself very familiar with them and choose one. Below, you will find some examples.

3.1. In-Text
The ISA Sociology Harvard Manual of Style, for in-text references. For example, (Author, Year) or (Author, Year: page). You can find a quick guide online at:
www.isa-sociology.org/publ/sociopedia-isa_harvard-style-guidelines.pdf

3.2. Bibliography
Chicago Manual of Style. You can find a quick guide online at:
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html
Below are the most important style requirements for books and articles:

Book
One author
Doniger, Wendy. 1999. *Splitting the difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Two authors
Cowlishaw, Guy, and Robin Dunbar. 2000. *Primate conservation biology.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Four or more authors
Laumann, Edward O., John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels. 1994. *The social organization of sexuality: Sexual practices in the United States.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Chapter or other part of a book
Wiese, Andrew. 2006. "The house I live in": Race, class, and African American suburban dreams in the postwar United States. In *The new suburban history,* ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, 99–119. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Chapter of an edited volume originally published elsewhere (as in primary sources)
Cicero, Quintus Tullius. 1986. Handbook on canvassing for the consulship. In *Rome: Late republic and principate,* edited by Walter Emil Kaegi Jr. and Peter White. Vol. 2 of *University of Chicago readings in western civilization,* ed. John Boyer and Julius Kirshner, 33–46. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Originally published in Evelyn S. Shuckburgh, trans., *The letters of Cicero,* vol. 1 (London: George Bell & Sons, 1908).
Journal article
Article in a print journal
Smith, John Maynard. 1998. The origin of altruism. *Nature* 393: 639–40.
Article in an online journal
If an access date is required by your publisher or discipline, include it parenthetically at the end of the citation, as in the fourth example below.
Hlatky, Mark A., Derek Boothroyd, Eric Vittinghoff, Penny Sharp, and Mary A. Whooley. 2002. Quality-of-life and depressive symptoms in postmenopausal women after receiving hormone therapy: Results from the Heart and Estrogen/Progestin Replacement Study (HERS) trial. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 287, no. 5 (February 6), http://jama.ama-assn.org/issues/v287n5/rfull/joc10108.html#aainfo (accessed January 7, 2004).

D) A Note on Academic Dishonesty and College Policies
The College and University policy on academic honesty and dishonesty is set forth in the USF Rules Manual (http://www.grad.usf.edu/plagiarism.php)

Here are some excerpts:

6. Violations and Sanctions for Graduate Students

The Office of Graduate Studies holds academic integrity in the highest regard. Graduate students are responsible for being aware of and complying with University Regulations and Policies and must conduct themselves accordingly. Sanctions for Academic Dishonesty will depend on the seriousness of the offense and may range from the receipt of:

- An "F" or "Zero" grade on the subject paper, lab report, etc.
- An "F" in the course or activity in which credit may be earned.
- An "FF" in the course (leading to expulsion from the University).
- Academic Dismissal for any violations of academic dishonesty policies or regulations.
- Possible revocation of the degree or Graduate Certificate following a thorough investigation.

Graduate students who are assigned an "FF" grade will be academically dismissed from the University and will not be eligible to apply to any graduate program within the USF system. Procedures regarding Academic Dishonesty and Academic Dismissal may be found on the Office of Graduate Studies' website: **http://www.grad.usf.edu** .

7. Additional Graduate Guidelines for Academic Dishonesty

1. If a graduate student who has been accused of academic dishonesty drops the course, the student's registration in the course will be reinstated until the issue is resolved.
2. Any assigned grade may be changed to an "FF", "F", or other grade depending on the instructor's decision or the ultimate resolution of an academic grievance procedure. This includes any instance of academic dishonesty that is not detected until after the student has dropped or completed the course.
3. Notification to the graduate student of the "FF" grade and the option of appeal concerning the alleged academic dishonesty and academic dismissal remains with the instructor and/or department chair (refer to the University Academic Grievance Procedures).
4. Dismissal for reasons of academic dishonesty will be reflected on the student's transcript with the formal notation: Dismissed for Academic Dishonesty.
5. More serious violations of academic integrity may be referred to the Office of Student Affairs as a student conduct violation.

Additional Advice and Guidelines:

How to Organize your MA Thesis
by Prof. John W. Chinneck
Dept. of Systems and Computer Engineering
Carleton University
Ottawa, Canada

Introduction

This note describes how to organize the written thesis, which is the central element of your graduate degree. To know how to organize the thesis document, you first have to understand what graduate-level research is all about, so that is covered too. In other words, this note should be helpful when you are just getting started in your graduate program, as well as later when you start to write your thesis.

What Graduate Research is All About

The distinguishing mark of graduate research is *an original contribution to knowledge*. The thesis is a formal document whose sole purpose is to prove that you have made an original contribution to knowledge. Failure to prove that you have made such a contribution generally leads to failure.

To this end, your thesis must show two important things:

- you have identified a worthwhile problem or question which has not been previously answered,
- you have solved the problem or answered the question.

Your contribution to knowledge generally lies in your solution or answer.

What the Graduate Thesis is All About

Because the purpose of the graduate thesis is to prove that you have made an original and useful contribution to knowledge, the examiners read your thesis to find the answers to the following questions:

- what is this student's research question?
- is it a good question? (has it been answered before? is it a useful question to work on?)
- did the student convince me that the question was adequately answered?
- has the student made an adequate contribution to knowledge?

A very *clear* statement of the question is essential to proving that you have made an original and worthwhile contribution to knowledge. To prove the originality and value of your contribution, you must present a *thorough* review of the existing literature on the subject, and on closely related subjects. Then, by making *direct* reference to your literature review, you must *demonstrate* that your question (a) has not been previously answered, and (b) is

worth answering. Describing how you answered the question is usually easier to write about, since you have been intimately involved in the details over the course of your graduate work.

If your thesis does not provide adequate answers to the few questions listed above, you will likely be faced with a requirement for major revisions or you may fail your thesis defense outright. For this reason, the generic thesis skeleton given below is designed to highlight the answers to those questions with appropriate thesis organization and section titles. The generic thesis skeleton can be used for any thesis. While some professors may prefer a different organization, the essential elements in any thesis will be the same. Some further notes follow the skeleton.

Always remember that a thesis is a *formal* document: every item must be in the appropriate place, and repetition of material in different places should be eliminated.

A Generic Thesis Skeleton

1. Introduction

This is a *general* introduction to what the thesis is all about -- it is *not* just a description of the contents of each section. Briefly *summarize* the question (you will be stating the question in detail later), some of the reasons why it is a worthwhile question, and perhaps give an overview of your main results. This is a birds-eye view of the answers to the main questions answered in the thesis (see above).

2. Background Information (optional)

A brief section giving background information may be necessary, especially if your work spans two or more traditional fields. That means that your readers may not have any experience with some of the material needed to follow your thesis, so you need to give it to them. A different title than that given above is usually better; e.g., "A Brief Review of Frammis Algebra."

3. Review of the Literature

Here you review the state of the literature relevant to your thesis. Again, a different title is probably appropriate; e.g., "State of the Art in Zylon Algorithms." The idea is to *present* (critical analysis comes a little bit later) the major ideas in the state of the art right up to, but not including, your own personal brilliant ideas.

You organize this section *by idea*, and not by author or by publication. For example if there have been three important main approaches to Zylon Algorithms to date, you might organize subsections around these three approaches, if necessary:

     3.1 Iterative Approximation of Zylons
     3.2 Statistical Weighting of Zylons
     3.3 Graph-Theoretic Approaches to Zylon Manipulation

4. Research Question or Problem Statement

Engineering theses tend to refer to a "problem" to be solved where other disciplines talk in terms of a "question" to be answered. In either case, this section has three main parts:

> 1. a concise statement of the question that your thesis tackles
> 2. justification, by *direct* reference to section 3, that your question is previously unanswered
> 3. discussion of why it is worthwhile to answer this question.

Item 2 above is where you *analyze* the information which you presented in Section 3. For example, maybe your problem is to "develop a Zylon algorithm capable of handling very large scale problems in reasonable time" (you would further describe what you mean by "large scale" and "reasonable time" in the problem statement). Now in your *analysis* of the state of the art you would show how each class of current approaches fails (i.e. can handle only small problems, or takes too much time). In the last part of this section you would explain why having a large-scale fast Zylon algorithm is useful; e.g., by describing applications where it can be used.

Since this is one of the sections that the readers are *definitely* looking for, highlight it by using the word "problem" or "question" in the title: e.g. "Research Question" or "Problem Statement", or maybe something more specific such as "The Large-Scale Zylon Algorithm Problem."

5. Describing How You Solved the Problem or Answered the Question

This part of the thesis is much more free-form. It may have one or several sections and subsections. But it all has only one purpose: to convince the examiners that you answered the question or solved the problem that you set for yourself in Section 4. So show what you did that is *relevant* to answering the question or solving the problem: if there were blind alleys and dead ends, do *not* include these, unless specifically relevant to the demonstration that you answered the thesis question.

6. Conclusions

You generally cover three things in the Conclusions section, and each of these usually merits a separate subsection:

> 1. Conclusions
> 2. Summary of Contributions
> 3. Future Research

Conclusions are *not* a rambling summary of the thesis: they are *short*, *concise* statements of the inferences that you have made because of your work. It helps to organize these as short numbered paragraphs, ordered from most to least important. All conclusions should be directly related to the research question stated in Section 4. Examples:

1. The problem stated in Section 4 has been solved: as shown in Sections ? to ??, an algorithm capable of handling large-scale Zylon problems in reasonable time has been developed.

2. The principal mechanism needed in the improved Zylon algorithm is the Grooty mechanism.

3. Etc.

The Summary of Contributions will be much sought and carefully read by the examiners. Here you list the contributions of *new* knowledge that your thesis makes. Of course, the thesis itself must substantiate any claims made here. There is often some overlap with the Conclusions, but that's okay. Concise numbered paragraphs are again best. Organize from *most* to *least* important. Examples:

1. Developed a much quicker algorithm for large-scale Zylon problems.

2. Demonstrated the first use of the Grooty mechanism for Zylon calculations.

3. Etc.

The Future Research subsection is included so that researchers picking up this work in future have the benefit of the ideas that you generated while you were working on the project. Again, concise numbered paragraphs are usually best.

7. References

The list of references is closely tied to the review of the state of the art given in section 3. Most examiners scan your list of references looking for the important works in the field, so make sure they are listed and referred to in section 3. Truth be known, most examiners also look for their own publications if they are in the topic area of the thesis, so list these too. Besides, reading your examiner's papers usually gives you a clue as to the type of questions they are likely to ask.

All references given *must* be referred to in the main body of the thesis. Note the difference from a Bibliography, which may include works that are not directly referenced in the thesis. Organize the list of references either alphabetically by author surname (preferred), or by order of citation in the thesis.

8. Appendices

What goes in the appendices? Any material which impedes the smooth development of your presentation, but which is important to justify the results of a thesis. Generally it is material that is of too nitty-gritty a level of detail for inclusion in the main body of the thesis, but which should be available for perusal by the examiners to convince them sufficiently. Examples include program listings, immense tables of data, lengthy mathematical proofs or derivations, etc.

Comments on the Skeleton

Again, the thesis is a formal document designed to address the examiner's two main questions. Sections 3 and 4 show that you have chosen a good problem, and section 5 shows that you solved it. Sections 1 and 2 lead the reader into the problem, and section 6 highlights the main knowledge generated by the whole exercise.

Note also that everything that *others* did is carefully separated from everything that *you* did. Knowing who did what is important to the examiners. Section 4, the problem statement, is the obvious dividing line. That's the main reason for putting it in the middle in this formal document.

Getting Started

The best way to get started on your thesis is to prepare an extended outline. You begin by making up the Table of Contents, listing each section and subsection that you propose to include. For each section and subsection, write a brief point-form description of the contents of that section. The entire outline might be 2 to 5 pages long. Now you and your thesis supervisor should carefully review this outline: is there unnecessary material (i.e. not directly related to the problem statement)? Then remove. Is there missing material? Then add. It is much less painful and more time-efficient to make such decisions early, during the outline phase, rather than after you've already done a lot of writing which has to be thrown away.

How Long Does it Take to Write a Thesis?

Longer than you think. Even after the research itself is all done -- models built, calculations complete -- it is wise to allow at least one complete term for writing the thesis. It's not the physical act of typing that takes so long, it's the fact that writing the thesis requires the complete organization of your arguments and results. It's during this formalization of your results into a well-organized thesis document capable of withstanding the scrutiny of expert examiners that you discover weaknesses. It's fixing those weaknesses that takes time.

This is also probably the first time that your supervisor has seen the formal expression of concepts that may have been approved previously in an informal manner. Now is when you discover any misunderstandings or shortcomings in the informal agreements. It takes time to fix these. Students for whom English is not the mother tongue may have difficulty in getting ideas across, so that numerous revisions are required. And, truth be known, supervisors are sometimes not quick at reviewing and returning drafts.

Bottom line: leave yourself enough time. A rush job has painful consequences at the defense.

Tips

Always keep the reader's backgrounds in mind. Who is your audience? How much can you reasonably expect them to know about the subject before picking up your thesis? Usually they are pretty knowledgeable about the general problem, but they haven't been intimately

involved with the details over the last couple of years like you have: spell difficult new concepts out clearly. It sometimes helps to mentally picture a real person that you know who has the appropriate background, and to imagine that you are explaining your ideas directly to that person.

Don't make the readers work too hard! This is fundamentally important. You know what few questions the examiners need answers for (see above). Choose section titles and wordings to clearly give them this information. The harder they have to work to ferret out your problem, your defense of the problem, your answer to the problem, your conclusions and contributions, the worse mood they will be in, and the more likely that your thesis will need major revisions.

A corollary of the above: *it's impossible to be too clear*! Spell things out carefully, highlight important parts by appropriate titles etc. There's a huge amount of information in a thesis: make sure you direct the readers to the answers to the important questions.

Remember that *a thesis is not a story*: it usually doesn't follow the chronology of things that you tried. It's a formal document designed to answer only a few major questions.

Avoid using phrases like "Clearly, this is the case..." or "Obviously, it follows that ..."; these imply that, if the readers don't understand, then they must be stupid. They might not have understood because you explained it poorly.

Avoid *red flags*, claims (like "software is the most important part of a computer system") that are really only your personal opinion and not substantiated by the literature or the solution you have presented. Examiners like to pick on sentences like that and ask questions like, "Can you demonstrate that software is the most important part of a computer system?"

Your Contribution

The purpose of your thesis is to clearly document an original contribution to *knowledge.* You may develop methodological tools, but remember, the thesis is *not* about the tool, it is about the contribution to knowledge. Tools such as computer programs are fine and useful products, but you can't get an advanced degree just for the tool. You must use the tool to demonstrate that you have made an original contribution to knowledge; e.g., through its use, or ideas it embodies.

Master's vs. PhD Thesis

There are different expectations for Master's theses and for Doctoral theses. This difference is not in format but in the significance and level of discovery as evidenced by the problem to be solved and the summary of contributions; a Doctoral thesis necessarily requires a more difficult problem to be solved, and consequently more substantial contributions.

The contribution to knowledge of a Master's thesis can be in the nature of an incremental improvement in an area of knowledge, or the application of known techniques in a new area. The Ph.D. must be a substantial and innovative contribution to knowledge.

Writing Essentials
(from the USF English Department)

1. A limited thesis is **stronger** for a paper than an ambitious one that suggests a book.

2. Use your language – your **best** language. Save the casual stuff for drafts, phone talk, e-mail, and those "whatever" moments. Avoid contractions (e.g., don't, isn't, and would've) in essay writing: write it out fully.

3. Have confidence in **having thoughts** (really!). Use writing to extend and display your lines of reasoning and insights.

Background to this advice: When writing about literature, students have a tendency to summarize the plot of a story or describe a character or scene without relating that textual information explicitly to an argument. You can avoid this tendency by ensuring that you are working from a thesis-based discussion. Any time you plan to bring up an example from the plot or other aspect of the literary work, be sure that you know why this example is important for your discussion and that you make that the reason explicit in your writing.
See also advice on integrating sources.

4. **Don't leave me hanging!** When expressing your thoughts, don't leave them unfinished or half-started.
For example: I read your essay and in it see: a paragraph with a great topic sentence, then a sudden fabulous quotation, then …. nothing.
You the writer are on to the next paragraph and point.
What happened?
Finish making your point, description, explanation, argument, or whatever got you started.
Paragraphs need middles and ends that show your fine thought process.

5. **Don't underestimate the power of refining and revising your work.** Allow time away from your writing before producing the final draft. Tip: print out the second-to-last draft, and then work on something else for half a day to a day. You will come back to your writing with fresh eyes and will see the areas left to develop or refine.

6. **Revise. Proofread. Proofread.**
• For development, coherence, evidence, and flow (correct abrupt transitions; reduce wordiness – redundancies, repetitions, padded phrasing). For enhancement of vocabulary. For mechanics of citations. For spelling (remember that computer spell checks will not catch the wrong word, such as "there" when you meant to write "their"), grammar (e.g., lack of subject-verb agreement, comma splices), typos, punctuation (e.g., fix the faulty "it's" when you meant "its" and other abuses of the apostrophe). The MLA Handbook has an excellent section on punctuation and grammar. Most common errors in undergraduate writing: comma splices, misuse of the semicolon and apostrophe, run-on sentences, lack of subject-verb agreement. At the upper-year undergraduate level, such errors should become rare. Three or more such errors in a short piece of writing (less than 10 pages) signals to a professor that the student either (a) lacks the skills to correct or (b) did not take

the time to correct before submission. Either way, such flawed work will lower the overall grade of the paper.
• When writing about literary fiction, use the present and present perfect tenses ("Emma Bovary is unhappy…"; "Emma has created an ironic situation…"). When you mention a character or place for the first time, give a full identification or contextualization.
• Then… proofread (try reading your paper aloud).

7. **Never use dropped quotations.** Integrate always. See my guidelines (below) and The MLA Handbook.

Instead of "dropping" a quotation, provide a phrase before, in the middle of, or after the quotation, and the appropriate punctuation; ideally your phrase gives some idea of why you are using the particular evidence, and at the very least the phrasing should provide some contextual information.

Example of a dropped quotation (underlined part):

 The unhappily married Emma Bovary searches for a fictional love. "She was the lover in every novel […]" (247). The narrator explains how Emma has become a fictional character.

Problem: The writer "drops" the quotation into her essay, letting the quotation stand on its own, as an independent clause, with the preceding sentence ending in a period. The sentence leading to the quotation needs to connect more clearly with the quotation, grammatically and stylistically.

Suggested correction:
The unhappily married Emma Bovary searches for a fictional love. By the time of her second affair, the narrator describes her as "the lover in every novel […]" (247), and goes on to enumerate the various physical ways in which she has become a fictional character.

Note that in this correction version (many more possible) the writer has made explicit why she is using this particular quotation; and in terms of punctuation and grammar, the quotation is integrated into the writing.

8. **Never start a paragraph in an essay with plot summary**. Instead, start your paragraphs with an interesting, informative topic sentence that establishes the point you will discuss, describe, explain, or argue in your paragraph.

9. **Let the title of your paper convey your thesis**, not some unrelated, but interesting idea that you did not end up developing in the paper. Relevance!

10. **Remove the verb "to be" whenever possible** and recast for leaner, tighter style:
a) "The heroine is deluded and worries …" > "The deluded heroine worries …"
b) "The point that Flaubert is making …" > "The point that Flaubert makes …" or "Flaubert shows/asserts/contends that…"
c) Passive voice: **convert to active when possible**
"The women have been virtually locked in the house."
"Bernarda Alba virtually locks her daughters and herself in the house."

Note the bonus of the active voice: more information regarding this action. The passive voice tends to veil agency; that is why it is so appropriate in bureaucratese and inappropriate for scholarly English writing.

<div align="center">**Integrating evidence:**</div>

You have three ways to integrate textual evidence in your writing: summary, paraphrase, and quotation.

The **summary** is for the exposition of the main point or idea of a long passage or for the condensation of the key points or information for your discussion.

The **paraphrase** is your expression (i.e., your words) of the ideas or information related in a relatively short passage; this technique is useful when the original passage needs clarification. You do not change the essence of the passage, but rather stay faithful to the author's meaning and content.

The **quotation** is best used when the original language is highly significant for your discussion.

<div align="center">**Integration of evidence:**</div>

In the paragraph in which you wish to introduce the evidence,

1) you will need to establish a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph to establish the topic or reason for the upcoming quotation, paraphrase, or summary. The use of the evidence should not come as a surprise; rather, you create a context for its use;

2) then you will introduce the quotation, paraphrase, or summary with an appropriate phrase;

3) quote, paraphrase, or summarize the evidence;

4) add whatever referential information necessary to accord with the MLA style;

5) then…. you will comment on the evidence that you just gave, further explaining its significance or relevance to your argument, explanation, description, account, or exposition.

<div align="center">**Vocabulary for integrating evidence**</div>

Attributive phrases use verbs in the *present tense*. To vary attributive phrases, try using some of the verbs listed below.

adds	denies	recommends	reports
agrees	derides	relates	endorses
asks	disputes	reveals	rejects
asserts	emphasizes	says	defends
believes	explains	sees	declares
claims	finds	shows	points out
comments	holds	speculates	refutes
compares	illustrates	states	contends
concedes	implies	suggests	observes
concludes	insists	thinks	responds
condemns	maintains	warns	
considers	notes	writes	

Verb list from The Allyn & Bacon Handbook, 3rd. ed. (572-94)

Quotations: Integration and grammar
Golden rule: When you quote, the quotation should be <u>relevant</u> and should <u>advance or illuminate</u> your discussion.

It is not necessary to provide a long quotation to accomplish this aim. Nor is it necessary to provide three or four quotations that all help you to make the same point. You may choose <u>one</u> particularly great quotation to provide the extended commentary, and then mention the other two as summary evidence with briefer commentary.

1) Use quotations of an entire sentence (or more) <u>sparingly and with good reason</u>. Thus, the longer block quotation (3 or more lines) must be worthy: what is special about the language and information? Provide that justification before and after making the quotation.

2) Use quotations for evidence that cannot be easily summarized or paraphrased.

3) When quoting, be sure to create a grammatically correct sentence; you may have to edit the quotation with [ ] to adjust for grammar or antecedents.

Example:
Original:
Bernarda: No one is to say a thing. She died a virgin.

As an integrated quotation in an essay:
Dictating the truth, Bernarda states: "No one is to say a thing. She [Adela] died a virgin" (288).

4) Quotations should generally not begin or end a paragraph. Remember, quotations must be justified, so what you write before and after them provides the frame.

5) At least introduce the quotation with a phrase: The narrator recognizes, " …"

6) Do not let quotations "speak for themselves." You are the writer: explain what is significant about the quotation and, ideally, use your explanation to extend or develop your argument.

In the first act, we encounter a grim taskmaster in Bernarda: "[insert the quotation]"

7) Provide the correct and appropriate information regarding the source of the quotation (or summary or paraphrase) (see the <u>MLA Handbook</u>), and thus avoid committing plagiarism.

8) Learn the <u>variety</u> of ways to make references to a text in your writing so that you do not repeat a formula excessively:

Example of style that can grow tired if used exclusively or excessively: Flaubert mentions, "…."

Remedies:
i) Use a different (more appropriate) verb:
Flaubert adds, asserts, considers, comments, concludes, describes, emphasizes, implies, maintains, notes, observes, speculates, states, recognizes, reports, reveals, shows, suggests, warns, writes, "…"

ii) Use a more extended phrase to contextualize your evidence or advance your argument or discussion:
In Part I, Flaubert considers, "…"
Flaubert concludes that ironically Homais has triumphed: "…"

Thesis Statements: A Guide for the Perplexed

1. Define your argument and assess: is it too broad, vague, general, obscure, obvious? Does it identify clearly the text and elements involved? Does it express an arguable, intelligent point of view as opposed to a fact?

Common dilemmas:

• Too broad – it would take a book to discuss the thesis

e.g., Nineteenth-century novels such as Madame Bovary show that women were second-class citizens.

As you are not writing an extensive study of nineteenth-century novels, you can dispense with the broad assertion ("Nineteenth-century novels such as…"). Focus on the novel at hand and tailor your assertions to your knowledge ("In Gustave Flaubert's novel Madame Bovary …").

• Too vague – the central idea is not identified clearly in appropriate, precise words and terminology

• Too general – the thesis could apply to almost any other text or literary category

• Too obscure – the thesis pursues a minor, overly speculative, or unclear topic which does not seem to have a debatable edge

• Too obvious – the thesis states a well-known or relatively evident fact or assessment

e.g., Madame Bovary is about a marriage in crisis.
No argument here – the writer has stated a fact about this novel.

Improved:
e.g., Madame Bovary criticizes the institution of marriage.
Now here is the beginning of an intriguing argument! The writer relates the case of the Bovarys to a critique of society.

2. Building a thesis out of a topic or theme: create a detailed statement using "because" after the assertion. After "because" list several points that will be the basis of your support. This is one way to determine whether you have an arguable assertion. Do your supporting points really defend your assertion? Can you find better points, or more of them? Do you tend to return to the same idea or to an idea which doesn't become profound? Can you discover more to say about it by analyzing or comparing it?

3. Building an edge: a good argument can persuade, but it should also provoke objections. Could one argue the opposite to your proposal? How would you list the qualities or expand? Brainstorm to discover more ideas for approaches. Very often, the first ideas for an essay need to become refined, expanded, limited, or re-arranged in some way before developing a good outline and drafts.

4. Still can't discover your thesis? More methods: try writing one or two pages of "discovery writing" in which you write non-stop about your topic without repeating yourself: try to discover as many ideas as possible about your topic. Or: try creating a quick outline of your topic. After seeing the overview of your paper, can you see what you thesis should be (where your argument lies)? Tip: often, the real ideas start to emerge towards the end of such an exercise. Thus, be prepared to edit the initial exploration work so that you can attend to the meatier issue.

5. Once you are satisfied that you have developed an argumentative thesis, you can develop your essay, starting with the structural outline, and followed by writing paragraphs. As you develop the composition, your argument may change as you present and discuss the material. It is often in writing that we discover our ideas. Be sure to re-assess and re-write your thesis statement so that you continue to present a coherent argument. The body of the paper should directly connect to what you set out to do in the introduction (including the thesis). The conclusion should synthesize the paper's findings and remain in harmony with the thesis. It should not contradict the thesis, nor should it present a new problem for discussion (i.e., don't end your essay with a new essay question).

6. In the thesis statement, ensure that you identify the author, the title, character's names, and other textual references that are essential to the argument as well as key events, figures, concepts, or terms (terms essential to your argument). In the introductory or second paragraph, the writer should define those terms.

7. Dissatisfied with your thesis because it seems too basic? Write a first draft and consider the point of your conclusion. Often writers finally discover the point they wish to make by the end of a discussion. The draft conclusion is the key to a more interesting and informative thesis. You can take the conclusion and position it at the beginning of the essay as the introduction. Now re-launch the essay: you may find all of the points that you previously discussed are valid, but can be taken to a more profound or insightful level. The new conclusion will differ from the first version.

Academic Integrity

The university highly values academic integrity, and part of being a university student means adhering to this code of conduct. For plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty, see the most recent undergraduate catalog: <http://www.ugs.usf.edu/catalogs.htm>; in the 2010-2011 catalog, pages 60-64; this part of the catalog provides USF's definitions and policies. You can consult with me if you are uncertain about these.

We discuss this issue on the first day of class. Students who miss this class are responsible for completing the plagiarism and academic dishonesty exercise given on the first day.

It is not an excuse to claim ignorance of plagiarism. It is the students' responsibility to be aware of what plagiarism is and not to commit it in the course of their studies. Consult the USF Undergraduate Catalog and The MLA Handbook. The 7th edition of the Handbook has a particularly excellent chapter (Chapter 2) devoted to plagiarism issues, including correct and incorrect methods of citation.

Punishment for any form of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will range from failure (0) on the assignment(s) in question to failure for the whole course and an "FF" on your record.

If a written assignment exhibits signs of plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty, I will contact the author for a formal face-to-face meeting. Further steps may follow depending on the circumstances. Students should be aware that if they commit an act of academic dishonesty they could jeopardize their assignment, their course, or even their program of study at the university because plagiarism is a serious offense and will lead to a FF grade!
The USF Writing Center can assist you with any writing difficulties. Contact them if you face such problems!

Helpful Literature

General:
Becker, Howard. 2007. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*: Second Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Research Design:
Vaus, David de. 2001. *Research Design in Social Research*. New York: Sage.

Methodology:
Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Critical Framework*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bernard, Russell. 2006. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. New York: Altamira Press.

This is one of the best methods textbooks out there – not just for Anthropology, but for all of the social sciences. It contains chapters on sampling, interviewing, participant observation, field notes, text analysis, as well as univariate, bivariate, and multivariate regression. It is available for free, online: http://www.antropocaos.com.ar/Russel-Research-Method-in-Anthropology.pdf

For Case Studies:
George, Alexander and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Boston: MIT Press.

For Qualitative Methods:
Sage Publication has the best collection of works on conducting qualitative research projects. You might find some of them helpful to your project:
http://www.sagepub.com/productSearch.nav?q=qualitative%20methods&prodTypes=any&subject=L00