

Department of American Studies
M.A. thesis requirements

I. General Requirements

The requirements for the Thesis in the Department of American Studies (DAS) fit within the general requirements holding for the School of English and American Studies (SEAS). That is, the Thesis should demonstrate the student's intellectual maturity and must be equivalent to an internationally approved Master's Degree Thesis. More specifically, the Thesis should

- demonstrate the student's sound knowledge of the subject and analytical ability;
- demonstrate a measure of originality;
- demonstrate familiarity with U.S. Studies theoretical framework relevant to the chosen topic;
- comply with the techniques of scholarly research, in 80,000 to 100,000 characters;
- comply with the techniques of academic writing: that is, (i) conform to standard American English spelling, grammar, and punctuation, (ii) cite sources appropriately, (iii) distinguish the Thesis writer's own ideas from those of other authors, and (iv) avoid plagiarism.

II. Research Options

The Theoretical Thesis

Students should note that the word *thesis* is often used ambiguously with regard to scholarly research. In one sense, *thesis* is used to refer to the entire text the student writes as a requirement for the university degree. In another sense, however, *thesis* is used to refer to a specific claim (or set of related claims) that a researcher believes to be valid. In these pages of guidelines for students, the word Thesis, with a capital *T*, will be used to refer to the 80,000–100,000-character text itself, whereas the word thesis, with a lower case *t*, will be used to refer to the main line of argument that the student pursues within the Thesis. Thus a Thesis may contain a thesis or set of theses. This terminology applies to the option of writing a theoretical Thesis, in which you, the student, have an interesting, important, and novel claim, i.e., a thesis (or set of related claims/theses) that you set forth at the beginning of the Thesis and for which you argue the validity in the body of the Thesis by means of supporting evidence, analysis and arguments. The appropriate research methods and style guidelines for this kind of Thesis are those published by the Modern Language Association of America, i.e., the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

The Empirical Thesis

The Thesis requirement may be satisfied by undertaking a different kind of research, namely an empirical study. In this case, the student begins with a research question or set of questions regarding a body of data. Typically a hypothesis (a proposition about the data that may or may not be true) is tested and data are collected and analyzed. The results of the data analysis will either confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis. These results are summarized and conclusions are drawn. In an empirical study, the researcher does not set out to prove anything, but rather to discover new facts and draw interesting conclusions. The appropriate research methods and style guidelines for this kind of Thesis are those published in the *Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)*; available in the library).

Note that writing a Thesis in U.S. history you are supposed to identify and analyze relevant published primary sources to build upon and support your theses.

III. Specific Guidelines for Writing the Thesis

Choosing a Topic

The topic of your Thesis is what the Thesis is about, i.e., the subject matter the Thesis deals with, such as a particular period of American history, a particular American writer or some aspect of American English. The Thesis topic may be drawn from the subject areas offered in the DAS curriculum: American English and Linguistics, Literature, History, Culture, or perhaps some combination of these. It is always best to choose a topic that you have a genuine interest in and that you are not only truly motivated to pursue in depth but also eager to inform others of in your Thesis.

Note that three advanced seminars are required in the subject area of your Thesis topic, thus it is important to begin to focus your research interests well in advance of beginning the writing of the Thesis. If you choose a Thesis topic in the area of American literature, note that one course in literary theory is required. If your Thesis topic is in the area of American history, a course in historical methodology is required. Be sure to check well in advance with your professors or the Department regarding specific Thesis requirements that may apply to your subject area of research.

Carrying out the Research

After selecting the Thesis topic, you will have to choose between the options of writing a theoretical or empirical Thesis. In either case, a knowledgeable review of the relevant research and recently published scholarship in your chosen subject area should appear in an early section of your Thesis.

To successfully complete the review of the literature in your research area, you should become familiar with the materials in the campus library as well as in other relevant libraries in the city. Librarians can show you how to use the computerized catalogs, CD-ROMs, subject searches, reference works, indices, periodicals, and other library resources. In addition, you should learn how to retrieve information from the Internet. Construct a plan for tracking down source materials and begin to assemble a working bibliography.

If you choose to carry out an empirical research project, give yourself plenty of time for collecting data. The data that you collect and analyze will depend, of course, on your subject area. For example, if your Thesis undertakes to discover something about American versus British English, you might collect data by means of surveying native speakers of the two varieties or from dictionaries or from written texts. These decisions must be given careful thought before data collection and analysis and the actual writing of the Thesis begins.

After you have compiled a working bibliography, the next step is to read and evaluate your material. You should not assume that something is truthful or trustworthy just because it is in print or available on the Internet. That is why you should weigh what you read against your own knowledge and the empirical data you have collected as well as against other treatments of the subject. When you have found material you consider reliable and useful to your purpose, you will want to take notes on it. Though no two researchers use exactly the same methods, there are, generally speaking, three ways of note-taking: summary (the general idea of large amounts of material), paraphrase (restating material in your own words) and quotation (word for word transcription of the material, using quotation marks scrupulously).

Developing the Argument

All good papers are basically organized in the same way: (1) Tell your readers what you are going to tell them. (2) Tell them what you want to tell them. (3) Tell them what you have told them. This summary refers to the necessity of (1) a careful introduction, (2) a body of argument, and (3) a conclusion.

Having these units in mind, create your Thesis by bringing together a series of related paragraphs, each one a brief composition itself. A well-constructed paragraph is unified (all of its sentences are focused on the same idea), coherent (the thought proceeds logically from sentence to sentence), and fully developed (it contains enough information to convey the idea in a reasonably thorough manner). Generally, paragraphs have their own structures:

- A topic sentence (often the first or second sentence) states the point that the paragraph develops.
- The other sentences offer examples, facts, expert opinion, and other evidence to support the topic sentence.
- Occasionally, a concluding sentence ties the evidence together or prepares for the point of the next paragraph.

To bind paragraphs and sentences so that they flow smoothly, you can use transitional expressions (such as *first*, *however*, *in addition*).

Though it is hard to say how long a paragraph should be, it stands to reason that to implement all the above you cannot possibly indent one sentence and call it a paragraph. In addition to avoiding skimpy, immature paragraphs, you should also avoid long paragraphs that contain several unrelated ideas.

Formatting the Text

The completed Thesis (excluding abstract, table of contents, the references section, and appendices) should be a total of 80,000 to 100,000 characters in length (ca. 40 to 50 pages). The bibliography should include at least 20 items (books and/or journal articles – NOT counting reference works such as dictionaries or encyclopedias). Using a standard font (e.g., Times New Roman 12 or Geneva 11) should provide approximately 2,000 characters per page with approximately 32 lines per page and approximately 60 characters per line. Depending on your Thesis option, you should follow the formatting guidelines of either the MLA or the CMS for in-text citations of source materials, footnotes vs. endnotes and appropriate format for Works Cited/References.

If writing a Thesis in American literature or literary/cultural theory, please use parenthetical documentation, footnotes or endnotes, and the list of works cited. There are two kinds of notes that may be used with parenthetical documentation: (1) content notes (offering the reader comment, explanation, or information that the text cannot accommodate) and (2) bibliographic notes (containing either several sources or evaluative comments on sources). Accordingly, notes are different from bibliographical entries in your works cited. For further information, consult the corresponding sections on parenthetical documentation in *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (3rd or later editions).

The Thesis should contain the following:

- A separate page entitled Pledge of Scholarly Honesty (see the text below).
 - A separate Title Page with the details shown on the SEAS webpage.
 - A separate page containing an Abstract that succinctly summarizes the Thesis in no more than one-half page, single-spaced.
 - It is advised that the Thesis be subdivided into Sections (and Sub-sections, if necessary), thus there should be a detailed Table of Contents.
 - The Thesis proper (with titles of chapters and subchapters, etc.).
- The Thesis should be submitted in hard copy as well as electronically. The name of the file should be the author's second name and the initial of the first name.

Scholarly Honesty versus Plagiarism

To write a long research paper or Thesis requires intellectual curiosity, enthusiasm, commitment and, last but not least, hard work. "The paper based on research is not a

collection of other persons' thoughts and words but a carefully constructed presentation of ideas that relies on research sources for clarification and verification" (*MLA Handbook*, Third Ed. 2). As such, the Thesis is an intellectual product reflecting its author's views and opinions in relation to those of a (segment of) scientific community for which s/he takes full responsibility. Consequently, authorship involves not only authority (power, expertness) that your words convey but also the responsibility you should assume for that power and expertness.

The reverse of scholarly honesty is plagiarism deriving from the Latin word *plagiarius*, meaning "kidnapper." According to Alexander Lindey, plagiarism is "the false assumption of authorship: the wrongful act of taking the product of another person's mind, and presenting it as one's own" (qtd in *MLA* 21).

It follows then that any attempt to use other people's work without adequate references to authorship leads to automatic failure. Plagiarism of any sort, any measure, and any amount is a number one reason to reject and/or fail Theses.

PLEDGE OF SCHOLARLY HONESTY

By my signature below, I pledge and certify that my ELTE M.A. thesis, entitled

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is entirely my own work. That is to say, the framing ideas are substantially my own and I have faithfully and exactly cited all the sources I have used, whether from conversations, books, letters, and other media, including the Internet. If this pledge is found to be false, I realize that I will be subject to penalties up to and including the forfeiture of the degree earned by my thesis.

IV. Consultations with a Supervisor

It is mandatory that each student consult with a supervisor from the faculty of the Department of American Studies in preparing the Thesis. It should be noted that in order to print that supervisor's name on the Thesis title page, a student must have had three consultations with the supervisor. Supervisors will sign the consultation forms after each of the three meetings (consultation forms are available in the DAS office). Note that whoever signs the form declaring the title of your Thesis is your supervisor.

You should discuss the feasibility of your chosen topic with your supervisor first, including the availability of your prospective source material and secondary literature, as well as that of a suitable and adequately qualified instructor to evaluate the Thesis, once ready and submitted.

We recommend that each student organize three consultations with the Thesis supervisor with the following goals in mind:

First Consultation:

present a typed two-page Proposal for the Thesis specifying the specific topic, the kind of Thesis to be undertaken (theoretical or empirical), the thesis/theses to be pursued or hypothesis/hypotheses to be tested, and a preliminary list of References. At this first consultation with a supervisor, the student must have already completed a significant amount of course work and any particular required courses for the Thesis topic. The Thesis Proposal should thus reflect a fair amount of background research and should be supported by a tentative Bibliography.

Second Consultation:

present the completed, typed draft of the Introduction and Review of the Literature sections of the Thesis along with a detailed outline of the remainder of the text.

Third Consultation:

present a completed draft of the Thesis for the supervisor to preview (not edit!). The supervisor will offer final advice and suggestions for additional improvements of the manuscript.

After the three consultations with the supervisor, it is the student's task to revise, edit, polish and perfect the final draft of the Thesis.

V. Grading

The Grading Policy applied by the Department of American Studies is as follows:

	Aspect	Pts.
1.	Concept: clearly legitimated objective and relevance to current trends of research	0–3
2.	Argumentation: structure and coherence, including logical table of contents, argued introduction with a thesis statement, consistency, meaningful conclusion, and systematic use of theoretical framework	0–5
3.	Research: research background, use of referred materials, size of reading list/bibliography (at least 20 books and/or journals), clearly established relation between the author and the employed literature, distinction between the primary and secondary literature	0–5
4.	Format: modeled on style manual (available in library); bibliographical consistency, notation, appendices, and illustrations (if needed)	0–3
5.	Language: clarity, fluency, spelling, vocabulary, grammar	0–4

Final Grades: 20–18 = excellent (*jeles*), 17–15 = good (*jó*), 14–11 = average (*közepes*), 10–9 = poor (*elégséges*), 8–0 = failure (*elégtelen*).

Please note that if the paper is shorter than required, or does not have some form of analysis in it, or lacks any of the structural elements, or is written in poor English, or fails to conform with the prescribed citation and referencing style, or has a shorter list of bibliography, or is plagiarized to any extent, it is failed automatically.