

GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE PROPOSALS

General Guidelines for All Proposals

As a first point of contact for the proposal, the title should be compelling and descriptive of the work you will undertake. Make sure that the proposal has a clear focus and identifies a subject area and an argument about that subject area, as well as a methodology or approach. This does not necessarily mean adopting a specific critical position, though it often does. Methodology can involve identifying a topic or problem, and explaining the approach that will be taken in relation to it. The proposal should make clear why this approach was chosen: why is it appropriate for the topic? what does it illuminate? The selection of texts should be well articulated and clearly justified. The significance of your argument should be demonstrated: how does it relate to prior scholarly work in this area? how does it contribute to the ongoing critical conversation? Finally, be sure to explain the pay-off of your research: why does this work matter?

The bibliography can do a lot for the proposal: it should be selective, indicating that preliminary research in the field is already underway. It can be helpful (though not essential) to subdivide the bibliography into sections for primary texts, selected criticism of these primary texts, and one or two lists of studies related to larger background questions (criticism of a general problem, cultural-historical writings, etc.). For example, a project on Puritan allegory in Hawthorne might be divided into: 1) primary works by Hawthorne, 2) relevant critical studies of those works, 3) general studies of allegory, and 4) intellectual and social histories of Puritanism. If your work is interdisciplinary, you can demonstrate this more clearly by grouping your texts according to the different fields relevant to your study.

Please respect the page limits stipulated for each proposal. They are designed to encourage conceptual clarity as you outline your research. Similarly, the page limit for each paper or project should be taken into account as you develop your proposal and, of course, adhered to when you ultimately submit your work.

All proposals are reviewed by the Graduate Administration Committee, which is made up of the Graduate Program Director plus three other members of the Department. The proposal should therefore be intelligible and compelling to scholars outside of the immediate subfield of English Studies that is the focus of the project. The GAC will return comments on the proposal, and the result of the decision will be either “Pass” or “Revisions Required” (i.e., revise and resubmit).

Samples of all types of proposal are available from Graduate Program Coordinator Maria Vasile (maria.vasile@mcgill.ca). The forms that must be submitted with the proposals can be downloaded from the Department of English Graduate Program website (<https://www.mcgill.ca/english/graduate/forms>) and can be completed using the “Fill and Sign” feature in Acrobat Reader.

MA Research Paper

Length of Paper: 40-50 pp., double-spaced; including works cited

Length of Proposal: 3-4 pp., double-spaced; plus a bibliography of 2-3 pp.

The proposal should identify the topic and outline the general approach, explaining why it is helpful and appropriate. Some general hypotheses about the conclusion of the argument should be presented, though the stages of argument do not need to be outlined. The relation of the argument to previous research in the field should be briefly suggested.

Method of Evaluation: The MARP is graded by the supervisor and one departmental member serving as a second reader.

MA Thesis

Length of Paper: approx. 80 pp. (maximum 100), double-spaced; including works cited

Length of Proposal: 4-5 pp., double-spaced; plus a bibliography of 3-4 pp.

The proposal should identify the topic and outline the general approach or methodology, suggesting why this approach has been chosen. It should position the topic in relation to current criticism in the area; though the MA thesis does not have to be original, it must demonstrate a capacity for scholarly research. In contrast to the proposal for the research paper, the MA thesis proposal should normally include a brief outline of the organization of sections or chapters which suggests how they work to present a connected, unfolding argument.

Method of Evaluation: The MA thesis is evaluated by an examiner (usually from within the department) nominated by the student in consultation with the supervisor. Evaluation is administered by the McGill Thesis Office.

PhD Optional Research Project

Time: 3 months (December - April, during first year of program)

Length of Project: 40 pp., double-spaced; plus works cited

The optional project must be the equivalent of two courses in terms of scope and reading. It must fit in with the student's program of study as a whole, and particularly satisfy the coverage requirement. It therefore should not duplicate the material or approach of the compulsory research project. Students wishing to

undertake the optional project must consult first with the Graduate Program Director to make sure the project fulfills these requirements.

Length of Proposal: 4-5 pp.; plus a bibliography of 5 pp.

The proposal should identify a narrow focus for the written work, but position it in the context of a broader set of readings, delineated in the bibliography, upon which the student will be examined in the oral defence. It should outline a topic and an approach, suggest some possible conclusions, and demonstrate a familiarity with previous work in the field.

Method of Evaluation: The project is given a letter grade by the supervisor and two committee members, based on the written paper and the oral presentation. The parameters for the exam are set in a preliminary meeting, normally held two weeks before the final exam.

PhD Compulsory Research Project

Time: 8 months (completed during winter term of second year in program)

Length of Project: approx. 40 pp., double-spaced; plus works cited

The compulsory project is designed to lead into the dissertation, normally as a preliminary investigation of the area of specialization or relevant background material. It is analogous to field exams set by other universities, and, in the oral exam, the student is expected not only to defend the written project but also to demonstrate a knowledge of the broader field related to the argument and indicated by the preliminary bibliography. The CRP is governed by the GPS policy on PhD Comprehensive Exams. The purpose of this project is to demonstrate the student's readiness to continue to the dissertation.

Length of Proposal: 4-5 pp.; plus a bibliography of approx. 7 pp.

The proposal should present a focused argument that will be the subject of the written paper; it should also indicate, partly through the bibliography, the broader research field involved, upon which the student will be examined orally. Like the optional project, it should outline a topic and an approach, suggest some possible conclusions, and demonstrate a familiarity with previous work in the field. It should also briefly indicate how the project ties in with the student's larger program of research, and in particular, the relationship to the dissertation.

Method of Evaluation: The project is given a pass/fail grade based on evaluation of the written paper and the oral presentation by the supervisor and two committee members. The parameters of the exam are set in a preliminary meeting, held normally two weeks before the final exam.

PhD Dissertation

Time: 2 years recommended (PhD4 and 5).

Length of Proposal: maximum 10 pp.; plus a bibliography of 10-20 pp.

The proposal should identify a topic and outline a conceptual framework. It should position the work in relationship to previous scholarship in the area, to show both how the research addresses current criticism and how it is original. The bibliography should also suggest a preliminary coverage of the field. The proposal should include a chapter-by-chapter breakdown that indicates how the argument will progress in stages. Chapter titles are helpful in indicating the content and argument of each section. The shape of the argument as well as the issues to be addressed must be outlined and the overall significance of the research should be clearly articulated.

Method of Evaluation: The dissertation is evaluated by one external examiner (an expert in the field, from outside the university and the department) and one internal examiner (from inside the department or the university) nominated by the student in consultation with the supervisor; it is also examined orally at a thesis defense, made up of departmental and university members. Evaluation is administered by the McGill Thesis Office.

Updated: November 2019