

Northwestern Theological Seminary

Thesis / Dissertation Helps & Guidelines

SEMINARY STUDENT RESOURCE

Writing a Thesis or Dissertation

A thesis is a writing that offers results of original research of a position or proposition that a person offers to maintain by argument. There are some important differences between writing a thesis and writing a course paper. The advice given is for the purpose of working and completing a thesis following certain guidelines.

Controlling The Content Of Your Topic

Topics can always be initially large, expanding our efforts to try to include too much information. Here are some tips to remember when planning your thesis:

- Your topic should be broad enough to address an important issue, yet narrow enough to address the issue thoroughly within the specifications given for the completion of the thesis. The important thing is to know just about everything about the topic you are writing about.
- Understand your limitations. Know and explore the resources necessary in order to have an idea of what is required to complete the thesis.
- When you get into your research, your topic will only seem bigger. Your topic can sometimes include a variety of issues and ideas, so control your focus in order to stand by your idea for the thesis. A good rule of thumb is that if you can't summarize your argument in a single paragraph, it is too big.
- Think about specific studies that you have taken in the past or would like to take in the future in order to compliment your thesis.

Self Imposed Reading Assignments

You should concentrate on reading in the beginning as much about your topic as possible. You will find that your topic will have a variety of different aspects, which you may find, provide a variety of avenues you can take in your topic.

Pay close attention to the footnotes, they will provide a wealth of resource materials you may not had considered.

Begin Writing While Researching

Write throughout your research process, taking notes as you read. Your reading should include writing summaries or small reactions. Summaries and reactions will provide you a wealth of information as you begin putting your thesis together. You will be able to track you the source of your information in your notes.

The important thing to consider is that the research is part of your writing process. It will allow for a series of questions to be confronted through your research in order to better understand your topic. Remember, you should have completed a number of initial drafts to your thesis before actually completing your final draft. These initial drafts should be written while in your research stage of the thesis writing.

Organize Yourself Before Beginning Your Thesis

You should plan before jumping in and just beginning to write or research. Consider the following:

- Create Due Dates throughout in order to account for your time
- Begin making a list of the books you need to read
- Articles and essays you may want to read
- Plan your argumentative goal for your thesis by writing points to consider and how you will present them
- You may want to make each point a chapter in your thesis, breaking down the process of the thesis into small papers on each chapter

Your Thesis Sentence

Give time to creating an effective sentence to your thesis by:

1. Making it a declarative written sentence and not a question.
2. Making sure it is argumentative. It should invite controversy.
3. Making it focused and functional. Don't repeat yourself throughout the sentence.
4. It is relevant to the research
5. Emphasizes what is original, interesting, or unusual about your argument. It should create interest.

Building Structure To Your Thesis

Your focus should be on creating outlines throughout your reading. Your outlines will evolve as you continue your reading and new ideas begin you come at you. Once your outline is established you may be able to separate the outlines into chapters making it more manageable by allowing you to work on each chapter individually. Keep in mind though, that all chapters should come together to present a unified work.

The Structured Text Of Your Thesis

The three major parts of your text are the opening, body, and conclusion.

- The Opening: The opening should clearly establish your topic and set limits on the scope of your examination. The opening of a paper has three parts: definition of the subject, a brief history of prior work in this subject area, and the expression of your thesis.
- The Body: The body of your paper should feature a logical development of the major points of your thesis. The primary concern should be to clarify and amplify the topic as you defend your thesis with well thought out statements.
- The Closing: This represents your conclusion to your thesis. This is your affirmation of your open and body.

Your Bibliography

After you complete your thesis, you should prepare a bibliography, listing the source material that was actually used in the writing of your thesis. You should begin writing bibliography cards for all references that could possibly be used in your topic. By paying attention to the footnotes and bibliographies of your reading materials during research, you can begin making up your cards for follow-up. Begin recording the following information:

1. Author's Name, followed by a period. Arrange the name in an inverted order, surname first, for alphabetizing purposes. Provide the name in the fullest form available, e.g., "Galloza, Michael J.," not "Galloza, M. J."
2. Title of the work, followed by a period. Enclose within quotations marks title of articles, essays, chapters, sections, short poems, stories, and songs. Underline titles of books, journals, pamphlets, newspapers, plays, movies, long poems, and operas.
3. Publication information. For a book: the place, followed by a colon; the publisher, followed by a comma; the date, followed by a period. For a journal article, the name of the journal, followed by a comma; the volume number in Arabic numerals; the date in parentheses, followed by a comma; the page(s), followed by a period. Spell in full titles of periodicals, e.g., Journal of Higher Education, not J. of Higher Ed.
4. Other items of documentation as necessary:
 - Name of the editor or translator
 - Edition used, whenever it is not the first
 - Series number
 - Number of volumes with this particular title
 - Volume number if one of two or more
5. A personal note, at the bottom of the card, as to the type of material to be found in this source or any special aspect it presents.

Bibliography Form – Books

Sample:

Wellman, Carl. Morals and Ethics. Glenview, Ill.:
Scott, Foresman, 1975.

However, if an author has two or more works in bibliography, do not repeat his or her name with each work. Rather, insert a continuous, twelve-space line flush with the left margin, followed by a period:

Sample:

Hansberry, Lorraine. A Raisin in the Sun. New York:
Random House, 1959.
----- . To Be Young, Gifted and Black. Ed. Robert
Nemiroff. Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-
Hall, 1969.

A chapter or a part of a book, placed before the title, within quotation marks or underlined, followed by a period:

Sample:

Elder, Lonnie. "Ceremonies in Dark Old Men." In New
Black Playwrights: An Anthology. Ed. William
Couch, Jr. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ.
Press, 1968.

Questions To Consider While Writing and Reviewing Your Thesis

- Is the argument and purpose still clear throughout the work?
- Is your introduction clear, providing background information, and plans and presents your thesis to the reader?
- Are your major points covered in logical order?
- Are your major points presented with enough evidence and analysis?
- Is your transition clear throughout your work?
- Is your conclusion logical to your introduction and body of the work?