

# STARTING (AND FINISHING!) YOUR THESIS OR DISSERTATION

## Questions?

Jodie Nicotra ( <a href="mailto:jnicotra@uidaho.edu">jnicotra@uidaho.edu</a> ), Director of Writing	Rami Attebury ( <a href="mailto:rattebur@uidaho.edu">rattebur@uidaho.edu</a> ), Librarian
Amy Ross ( <a href="mailto:ross8344@vandals.uidaho.edu">ross8344@vandals.uidaho.edu</a> ), Graduate Writing Tutor	Valerie Roberts ( <a href="mailto:valerier@uidaho.edu">valerier@uidaho.edu</a> ), COGS

## NITTY-GRITTY ADMINISTRATIVE STUFF

### College of Graduate Studies Online Thesis Handbook

([http://www.uidaho.edu/cogs/current\\_students/resources](http://www.uidaho.edu/cogs/current_students/resources)). For formatting instructions, forms, etc.

### 2010-2011 Deadlines for Submitting Theses/Dissertations

Deadline for fall 2010 is December 17, 2010

Deadline for spring 2011 without spring registration is January 11, 2011

Deadline for spring 2011 is May 13, 2011

Deadline for summer 2011 is August 5, 2011

### Necessary Forms

- Protocol Approval (as necessary) from Human Assurance Committee, Animal Care and Use Committee, Biohazards Committee, Radiation Safety Commission, Idaho Research Foundation, University Research Office, Office of Sponsored Programs
- Application for Advanced Degree (semester before you plan to finish)
- Request to Proceed with Final Defense of Thesis/Dissertation
- Report of Final Defense

## PRE-WORK

1. Establish a clear structure. With your advisor,
  - clarify a good question (one that matches with your interests but is also relevant and marketable);
  - establish clear guidelines re: the process and what will be expected of you;
  - establish a timeline with due dates (for proposal, chapter drafts, complete final draft, defense date, etc.);
  - decide what role the other members of your committee will play in the process.
2. It's a good idea to turn in a proposal early in the process to clarify what you plan to do in the project and make sure that everyone is on board with it ahead of time (see other side for typical proposal structure and tips for writing). After you discuss the proposal with your advisor, you can then send it to the other members of your committee. It's a good idea to set up a meeting time where all of you can discuss it.

## PROPOSALS

1. See attached sample proposal structure.
2. It's a good idea to do a literature review as part of the proposal (of course, for science dissertations/theses this will be part of the document itself). While you have obviously learned from seminars, coursework, and lab work, this is probably your first major foray into the field. Doing a literature review will give you a better sense of the relevant questions or conversations within the field. Literature reviews also, generally speaking, help you to establish a better question for your project.
3. Framing an appropriate question (one that's significant, answerable, and relevant to the field) and deciding on sites to examine is the most important part of the pre-work.

## WRITING

1. Divide up large tasks into more manageable ones. Commit yourself to working on your project (especially the writing part) for **at least fifteen minutes every day** to prevent procrastination and to keep the project moving. Keep a writing log.
2. Don't be afraid to write. Take Anne LaMotte's advice and write "shitty first drafts."<sup>#</sup>
3. Talk with your advisor about reading chapter drafts: earlier intervention often saves you and her/him a lot of work down the line (I recommend having due dates for chapter drafts).

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\* For more on this, see Peg Boyle Single, *Demystifying Dissertation Writing* (Stylus Publishing, 2009); Joan Bolker, *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1998); Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Paul J. Silvia, *How to Write a Lot* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007).

<sup>#</sup> Anne Lamotte, *Bird by Bird* (New York: Random House, 1994).

4. If your advisor has more than one student working on a dissertation or thesis, a dissertation/thesis group might be a good idea. Meet once every three weeks to collectively review somebody's draft.
5. Make sure that your advisor sees a final draft well before your defense date so that you have time for revision.

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## MASTER'S THESIS EXAMPLE PROPOSAL STRUCTURE

Writing an overview of your project is designed not only to formally announce your intentions as far as your Master's thesis goes, but also to help you become more fluent in and informed about the topic for your project. 7-8 double-spaced pages should probably be enough. Broken into fully developed sections, each with a heading, this overview should include:

1. Introduction.
  - Introduces the topic in broad terms.
  - States how you came to be interested in the topic.
  - Briefly summarizes the context and significance of the project.
  - Creates reader interest in the project.
2. Statement of problem or question.
  - Frames the problem or question that your thesis will be addressing.
  - The **problem** is an issue that arises out of the scholarly literature, theory, or practice that necessitates further study.
  - Answers, plainly and clearly, the question "why does this research need to be conducted?"
3. Literature review.
  - Relates the proposed project to specific questions and areas of inquiry within the field.
  - Situates the project within the "conversation" of a field. Who in the field would be interested in reading your thesis?
  - Explains how your project will extend, revise, or complicate what is already known.
  - For a proposal, the literature review should be relatively brief, and should cite/incorporate only the most appropriate sources for establishing the work that's been done on the subject.
4. Statement of overall purpose.
  - Should include a statement that begins "The purpose of this study is..."
  - Provides a clear and succinct synopsis of the project.
  - Identifies and defines the central concepts of the study.
  - Identifies the method of study.
5. Chapter overviews.
  - Includes titles, indicates what question you plan to answer and why this particular site is the best one to answer this question.
6. Explanation of limitations.
  - What is your project *not* addressing and why?
  - What are some of the weaknesses of your approach to the topic?
7. Statement of project's significance.
  - What specifically will this project contribute to the field? How will it address the questions or gaps in scholarship that you identified in your literature review? Why is it important to do?
8. Work plan/timeline.
9. Bibliography.