

MFA Thesis Guidelines

This packet was revised in September 2024 and supersedes all previous guidelines. Please check the website for most current information.

What is Thesis?

Thesis is the major creative project all MFA students complete at the end of their studies. Thesis requires two semesters to complete (Thesis 1 and Thesis 2). **All students begin Thesis I in the fall and complete Thesis II in the spring.**

In the thesis project, students are expected to demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes established within their chosen genres. When complete, the manuscript should be of sufficient quality that the student can submit all or part of it for publication, grants, The Loft Mentor Series, residencies, and other contests and awards. The completed manuscript may also provide the basis for a full book to be completed after graduation.

Prose: All prose theses are limited to 80-100 pages. While students can certainly work on a full book manuscript while they are in the program, the thesis will focus on the writing and revision of 80-100 pages. Prose projects may be part of a novel or memoir, a novella, a collection of short stories, a collection of essays, a novella-length essay, or a hybrid work.

Poetry: All poetry theses are limited to 48-64 pages. While students can certainly work on longer collections while they are in the program, the thesis will focus on the writing and revision of 48-64 pages of poetry.

When Is a Student Ready to Register for Thesis?

Students must have completed a minimum of 32 credits before beginning Thesis 1, but it is recommended that students have completed 36 or 40. Students are required to take “Groundings in the Craft” and two workshop in their thesis genre.

Thesis Timeline

Please read all 15 steps carefully.

Step 1: Submit Intent to Register

Deadline: October 1 of the year *before* you begin Thesis I.

The intent to register form is a Google Form, which will be emailed out to the MFA student body at the beginning of each fall semester.

On this form, students should identify the genre in which they intend to write their thesis.

Step 2: Receive Assignment of Primary Thesis Advisor and Outside Reader

Students will receive their primary advisor and outside reader assignments via email by April.

After receiving primary advisor and outside reader assignments, students should begin working on their thesis drafts and planning a prospectus.

Step 3: Form Thesis Study Groups (Optional, but encouraged)

Using the contact information of other students enrolling in thesis, sent out by the CWP office, students are encouraged to form thesis study groups with each other. Names and emails will be sorted by genre so students can form groups based on genre if they so choose.

Once the contact information is sent out, it is the responsibility of the students to form thesis study/support groups, meet, and make plans for critiquing work or any other writing group activities.

Step 4: Write Prospectus and Have Prospectus Meeting

Deadline: Before beginning for Thesis 1 (usually between May and August).

The Prospectus is a written statement describing the scope and content of your intended thesis and the way in which it will be pursued. Please use the **Prospectus Guidelines** in preparing your Prospectus.

Once you have prepared your Prospectus, you should schedule a Prospectus meeting with your primary thesis advisor. This meeting must take place *before* you begin Thesis 1. You should provide a copy of your Prospectus document by email at least one week prior to the meeting. At the Prospectus meeting, you and your primary thesis advisor will discuss the subject, methodology, and process for your thesis, and they may make suggestions for improvement or expansion. You and your advisor also will develop a plan for the semester.

Step 5: Register for Thesis 1

Deadline: April 1

Students must fill out and submit a **Thesis Registration Form for Thesis 1** by April 1.

Step 6: Statement of Intention to Graduate

Deadline: November 1

Students must fill out and submit an **Intent to Graduate & Degree Completion** form by November 1 of semester they begin Thesis I.

Step 7: Turn in a Complete Draft to Your Primary Thesis Advisor

Deadline: no later than November 1

Students can turn in a draft at any time during the fall semester, up until November 1. The primary advisor will read the thesis manuscript and provide feedback for revision in Thesis 2.

Step 8: Feedback Meeting

Deadline: This meeting will take place before winter break.

At this meeting you and your primary thesis advisor will discuss the Thesis 1 manuscript. Your primary thesis advisor will identify strengths and weaknesses in the work and will provide constructive critical feedback for revision.

Step 9: Schedule a Thesis Defense and Submit a Thesis Defense Notification Form

Deadline: As soon as possible after registering for Thesis II.

It is the student's responsibility to coordinate a day and time for the meeting with their primary thesis advisor and outside reader, **and** with the CWP office. **The thesis defense must take place before May 5.** The thesis defense lasts 1-1 ½ hours.

Step 10: Turn in Final Draft to Primary Thesis Advisor and Outside Reader

Deadline: A *hard copy* of your Thesis 2 draft must be delivered to your primary thesis advisor and your outside reader by March 1.

The Thesis 2 draft should be a complete body of revised material that demonstrates a solid understanding of the elements of craft within the genre and is at a level that is ready to be submitted for contests, grants, agents, or editors. It should address the craft issues raised by the primary thesis advisor in Thesis 1. The draft must be in hard copy, carefully edited and proofread. Any manuscript

that contains significant grammatical errors will be returned to the student unread and will need to be revised. (If the revision cannot be done and the manuscript read by your primary thesis advisor within the semester timeline, you will have to register for another semester of Thesis 2.) The student is responsible for arranging the delivery of the hard copy to the primary thesis advisor and outside reader.

Step 11: The Artist Statement

Deadline: At least one week prior to your Thesis Defense

The Artist Statement is an essay of 8-12 pages required of all graduating MFA students. Think of this essay as “The Conscious Artist Statement” in which the writer deeply explores and conscientiously conveys what they have learned as an artist in the process of completing the thesis manuscript. This can include reference to texts or other literary influences that helped to guide or shape the project. The Artist Statement should not be essential to the reader’s comprehension of the thesis. It is a separate document (though it will reside as a preface to the final copy of your thesis.) While the essay may take the form of a traditional essay or a more experimental lyric essay, it must be a well-written, unified piece of writing. You should give a hard copy of your Artist Statement to your primary thesis advisor and your outside reader at least one week prior to your Thesis Defense.

Step 12: The Thesis Defense

Deadline: Prior to May 5

At the end of the thesis process, MFA students participate in a Thesis Defense attended by the primary thesis advisor and the outside reader. At the defense, students will be given the floor for the first 5 minutes. With this time, they should pose questions about their work they would like addressed, frame their work and give context for their project, and/or discuss challenges they continue to face in executing this project.

Step 13: Graduate Readings

Students will have an opportunity to participate in a celebratory reading of their work. Friends, family, faculty, and other students are invited to attend this event. Students will prepare a section or selections (10 minutes max) from their thesis to share with an audience.

Step 14: Graduation

Once all steps have been successfully completed, the student is ready to graduate! Information on graduation will be sent to students closer to the date, including information about Commencement,

gown ordering, etc. Hamline University holds one commencement ceremony each year in May. Students who complete their degrees in summer or fall will have their transcripts updated and a diploma ordered after their thesis conferences. Summer and fall grads are welcome to participate in the May graduation ceremony and will be listed in the commencement program.

Step 15: Final Formatted Copies

Deadline: Anytime between your Thesis Defense and Graduation

Digital Commons

As a way to contribute to the MFA work archived with Hamline University, students must submit a digital copy of their final, revised thesis to [Hamline Library's Digital Commons](#). If you have any questions, please contact digitalcommons@hamline.edu. Digital Commons is a Hamline University-hosted portal providing an open-access online repository for scholarship and artistic works. Students retain the copyright for all material submitted to DC. It is important to note that there are two options for access. Most writers will check **Restricted Access Thesis**, which means that only current HU students, alumni, faculty, and staff will have access to the work. Authors retain the rights to first publication and distribution. This is very important for those students hoping to publish their thesis work. The **Outside Option Thesis**, provides open access to the work in electronic form to anyone who wishes to read it.

Thesis Binding

While CWP does not provide binding services for your thesis, we encourage you give your work the professional treatment it deserves as a part of your own archival process. Local bindery, [Campbell-Logan](#) is an option, as are more cost-effective online services like [Shutterfly](#), [smartpress](#), or [lulu.com](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

Is it possible to register for Thesis 1 in a spring semester or in the summer?

No. All students must register for Thesis 1 in the fall and Thesis 2 in the spring.

Can I make arrangements with a faculty member to serve as my primary advisor or outside reader before turning in the Intent to Register form?

No. Students may not make arrangements with any faculty members to serve as primary advisors or outside readers. All primary advisors and outside readers are assigned by the CWP office.

What are the expectations for the final Thesis 1 manuscript?

In order to pass Thesis 1, the full arc and vision of the project must be visible in the manuscript, it must demonstrate a basic ability to execute the forms and elements of the craft within the genre. Necessary revision work must be possible within the framework of Thesis 2. The draft must be proofed carefully for correctness and must be readable as a draft. Manuscripts that require more than minimal copy editing will be returned. Students whose work does not meet these requirements will be required to register for a second semester of Thesis 1.

What are the expectations for the Thesis 2 manuscript?

The goal of Thesis 2 is to complete a body of revised material that demonstrates the ability to execute the forms and elements of craft within the genre and is at a level ready to be submitted for contests, grants, agents, or editors. The Thesis 2 manuscript should address the craft issues raised by the primary thesis advisor during Thesis 1.